

Conversation and Performance  
in Seventeenth-Century French Salon Culture

Mallika Lecœur

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2011

© 2011  
Mallika Lecœur  
All rights reserved

## ABSTRACT

### Conversation and Performance in Seventeenth-Century French Salon Culture

Mallika Lecœur

This work focuses on social and artistic performance in seventeenth-century French salons, and the representation of this aristocratic culture through performance. It seeks to understand how polite amateurs regarded professional performers, and vice versa. I use the study of performance to reveal distinctive constraints and liberties of early modern aristocratic culture, to identify and compare its aesthetic and moral values, to uncover forgotten practices specific to the salon, and to elucidate the rapport between the sexes in this social setting. Finally, I consider the salon as a subject of dramatic representation in order to interrogate the distinctions and reflections between aristocratic performance and professional performance in the seventeenth century.

The art of conversation practiced in the salon was a performance that hid itself between interlocutors under a guise of refined “naturalness.” It was integral to aristocratic culture, as were the polite arts of singing, poetic recitation, acting, voiced reading, and impersonation. However, all of these performances presented certain risks for salonnières, for through them the performer could possibly appear affected, duplicitous, immodest, undignified, or malicious, the same vices commonly attributed to lowly stage performers. My study proposes answers to the following two questions: How did salonnières endeavor to reconcile performance artistry with the aristocratic ideals of naturalness and civility? How did salon performance practices in turn influence stage practice, notably the staging of salon conversation?

Conversation and Performance  
in Seventeenth-Century French Salon Culture

- Contents -

Introduction	1
<i>Reassessing Elias's Historical Vision</i>	3
<i>Performance in Conversation, Conversation as Performance</i>	11
<i>Conversations in Performance</i>	17
<i>The Telling Detail: Teasing Out Reality from Myth</i>	20
<i>Introducing the Salon</i>	24
 1. Pleasure in Performance	 34
<i>Castiglione's Legacy in the Seventeenth-Century French Salon</i>	36
<i>Performing for One's Pleasure</i>	53
<i>Pleasure in Sight-Reading</i>	62
<i>A "Writerly" Performance</i>	72
<i>The Pleasure of Parody</i>	79
 2. Between Artistic Freedom and Social Constraint	 99
<i>Physical Humor in the Salon</i>	100
<i>The Art of Impersonation</i>	112
<i>A Modest Performance</i>	128
 3. Performance Arts that Hide Themselves	 154
<i>Social Grace: Innate or Acquired?</i>	155
<i>"Être bon acteur"</i>	163

<i>The Performance of Gallantry</i>	173
<i>Poetic Recitation and Memory Performance</i>	180
<i>Conversation as Recitation</i>	193
<i>Impromptu</i>	198
4. Between the Salon and the Stage: Maintenon's <i>Conversations</i>	205
<i>Salon Culture at Saint-Cyr</i>	206
<i>Maintenon Reads Scudéry</i>	217
<i>But Were They Performances?</i>	238
5. The Superperformance of Molière's Salons	256
<i>Sitting on the Stage</i>	258
<i>When Characters Become Actors</i>	274
<i>Acting Naturally</i>	288
<i>The Performance of Complaisance</i>	294
<i>Conclusion: Salon and Stage Relativized</i>	314
Conclusion	322
Bibliography	
<i>Primary Sources</i>	325
<i>Secondary Sources</i>	330

## - List of Figures -

I:	<i>Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets</i> (frontispiece)*	33
II:	<i>L'Art de plaire dans la conversation</i> (frontispiece)*	33
1:	“Femme de qualité à sa Toilette” (engraving)* “Dame de Qualité Chantant” (engraving)*	71
2:	Sarabande d’Amarillis (vocal score)	89
3:	Chanson sur l’Air de la Sarabande d’Amarillis (vocal score)	89
4:	“Uranie chantant avec Damon” (engraving)* (untitled engraving of two salonnières singing)* “Dame de Qualité jouant de la Guitare” (engraving)*	139
5:	“Mes yeux, mes tristes yeux” (vocal score)*	142
6:	“Que vostre humeur se plaise au changement” (vocal score)	144
7:	(untitled engraving of a <i>commedia dell’arte</i> scene)* “L’Agréement aux Dames” (engraving)* “Femme de Qualité estante a ces necessitez” (engraving)*	273
8:	“Si le Roy m’avait donné” (vocal score)	305
9:	“Dans notre village” (vocal score)	307

\* image not available due to copyright restrictions

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the persistent guidance, inspiration, and motivation of several individuals. I would like to thank my sponsor Pierre Force for his honest assessment of my work and my vision since the inception of this project, for anchoring me and keeping me focused with sound advice, and for always being there, in person, by phone, and through e-mail, even after my move to France. I would also like to thank my readers Joanna Stalnaker and Giuseppe Gerbino who generously provided me with comments and criticisms, patiently explaining to me how to problematize and work critically and creatively with my research material.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my family, without whom I would not have made it to the finish line. I thank my parents, Lekha and Stephen Keister, for carefully reading each chapter (and each revised chapter). Your historical, literary, and rhetorical expertise and discernment have been indispensable to me. I also thank my grandmother, Ammachi, for encouraging me to continue my work and for providing me, through her inspiring example, with the hope and confidence I needed in order to complete it. Last but not least, I would like to express my appreciation for my husband who has admirably played the rather thankless role of pressuring me to finish this work in a timely manner, on the one hand, and imposing some balance between work and family life, on the other. Thank you so much for facilitating my efforts on a daily basis and for instilling in me a more rigorous sense of organization. I dare say, “Oui, on a bien fait.”

## Introduction

This study explores the relationship between aristocratic sociability and artistic performance in seventeenth-century France. It will show, on the one hand, how polite conversation was a type of performance and, on the other, how vocal performance practices, namely song, dramatic declamation, poetic recitation, voiced reading, and the art of impersonation, were integral to the art of sociability. In the present “Introduction,” I will explain how my study challenges the common assumption that this aristocracy fostered a culture of constraint and affective suppression. I will then present the structure of my study chapter by chapter, my investigatory approach, and finally my understanding of the “salon,” a highly flexible construct defined by the practice of conversation, a social performance serving as a platform for artistic performances among the elite.<sup>1</sup>

In seventeenth-century France, the aristocracy resisted a clear-cut definition based on traditional criteria such as a noble birth, economic prosperity, or political power. The poet Vincent Voiture was the son of a wine merchant, and yet he exemplified aristocratic refinement under the protection of Gaston d’Orléans and at the hôtel de Rambouillet. The prominent theorist and “paragon of *honnêteté*” Antoine Gombault, chevalier de Méré insisted that an air of aristocracy could and should be sustained in public regardless of one’s bad fortune (e.g., financial loss, defeat at court, political demotion, social disgrace). Aristocracy constituted a personal quality, a special air, a social grace reflecting one’s

---

<sup>1</sup> The distinction between “artistic” and “social” performance in the context of refined conversation is admittedly questionable. The performance of a song or a dramatic declamation during a conversation is invested with both an artistic value and a social function, and the practice of conversation is a veritable performance art. As Antoine Lilti maintains in *Le monde des salons*, 283: “la conversation est d’abord un spectacle qui vaut pour sa capacité à distraire, à amuser, à surprendre, mais aussi à mettre en valeur les beaux parleurs.” When I distinguish between “artistic” and “social” performance, I am generally referring to the difference between a discrete musical, dramatic, or poetic demonstration and the ongoing dialogue of conversation.



refinement of manners and culture, and one's adhesion to certain aesthetic and moral values (i.e., moderation, politesse), according to an idea of social superiority referred to as "l'Usage."<sup>2</sup> Though the quality of aristocracy often seemed to coincide with nobility of blood and elevated political status, it was not contingent on them. Etymologically speaking, aristocracy signifies "rule of the best"; and it was the priority of many in seventeenth-century France, whether of noble or of bourgeois stock, affluent or economically unstable, powerful or in search of power, to present themselves in the "best" possible light, thus as aristocrats, according to shared social values.<sup>3</sup> Aristocracy was not an innate quality automatically conferred through one's sociopolitical standing; it had to be demonstrated through one's speech and comportment. Aristocracy can thus be conceived of as a socializing performance, and this performance took place primarily through the practice of conversation within a group.

The literary critic Elizabeth Goldsmith has qualified the aristocratic art of conversation in seventeenth-century France, specifically as it is represented in the fictions

---

<sup>2</sup> Vaugelas, "Preface" to *Remarques sur la langue française*, n.p.: "Voicy donc comme on definit le bon Usage. *C'est la façon de parler de la plus saine partie de la Cour, conformément à la façon d'écrire de la plus saine partie des Auteurs du temps.* Quand je dis *la Cour*, j'y comprends les femmes comme les hommes, & plusieurs personnes de la ville où le Prince reside, qui par la communication qu'elles ont avec les gens de la Cour participent à sa politesse." See also Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 40-41: "l'accent étranger nous frappe tout d'un coup, Je ne dis pas que les Parisiens n'aient une grande disposition à altérer la prononciation [...] mais trop de personnes de Cour, & de littérature cultivent la langue à Paris, pour qu'on ait lieu de craindre du changement dans *le bel usage* de la parole." Emphasis mine.

<sup>3</sup> The historian Benedetta Craveri notes in that the use of the term "aristocracy" was established during the French Revolution, and this term was "coniato con intenzione dispregiativa al tempo della Rivoluzione. Nell'Antico Regime, l'unica parole esistente per indicare i rappresentanti del Secondo Stato era 'nobiltà.'" See Craveri, *La civiltà della conversazione*, 17-18. Thus Norbert Elias uses the term "aristocracy" in his historical studies to designate the social elite in France, as distinct from the bourgeoisie, during the period spanning from the seventeenth century to the eve of the Revolution. It should be noted, however, that the term "noblesse" in seventeenth-century France referred more globally to a social ideal of culture and refinement, whereas today this term more narrowly connotes a social class. I have therefore chosen "aristocracy," rather than "nobility," in order to designate the social ideal to which the French nobility and bourgeoisie aspired in the seventeenth century.

of Madeleine de Scudéry, as “an elaborate game” distinct from “a wider social reality,” entailing distinct “rules” that governed each interlocutor’s speech and behavior vis-à-vis the others.<sup>4</sup> I do not consider the seventeenth-century art of conversation as a set of rules and codes to be followed. True, general rules of correct social conduct did exist and were detailed in numerous manuals and treatises of the period. The principal and paradoxical rule was, of course, that of decorum: one must not follow rules in a strict manner, but adapt them according to the social status, personality, and mood of one’s interlocutors. Many aristocratic cliques developed distinctive rules of conduct that could appear “mysterious” to the uninitiated outsider.<sup>5</sup> However, the ideal of aristocracy was more subtle, subjective, and evasive than what could be expressed and executed through a set of rules. This ideal was a special “air” often referred to as a *je ne sçay quoy* distinguishing “true” aristocrats from mere imitators. To successfully interpret the rules of sociability was to transcend them, or to dissimulate them behind what was supposed to appear as natural behavior. A mysterious performance indeed.

### ***Reassessing Elias’s Historical Vision***

My study is presented in part as a response to the theories of the sociologist and historian Norbert Elias, who has most famously analyzed seventeenth-century French aristocratic culture in *The Civilizing Process* (1939, 1968) and *The Court Society* (1933, 1969). These two studies have gained much international interest and endorsement since they were first translated into English in 1978 and 1983, respectively. They provide a historical and sociological explanation for what Elias perceives as common psychological

---

<sup>4</sup> Goldsmith, “‘L’Art de détourner les choses,’” 21.

<sup>5</sup> See La Bruyère, *Les Caractères*, 191.

phenomena in current Western society: deep-seated frustrations and inhibitions resulting from the suppression of affective impulses and from the reflexes of self-consciousness and self-restraint. Elias traces self-restraint in the modern-day psyche back to aristocratic social customs developing concurrently with the formation of a powerful state. This social and political situation is exemplified for Elias by the French aristocracy under the personal reign of Louis XIV,<sup>6</sup> the dominant culture of which persisted until the French Revolution. Elias posits that aristocratic social constraints spread throughout society through growing contact, division of labor, and economic interdependence between classes, thus through a trickledown effect.<sup>7</sup> In this “civilizing process,” the social constraints became more deeply engrained from one generation to the next, gradually transforming into second nature. Elias’s portrayal of the seventeenth-century French aristocracy is at the same time critical and flattering: by identifying it with social constraint, Elias implicitly insists on its refinement. My study does not address Elias’s proposed correlation between past sociability and present psychology. However, it does question the implication in Elias’s work that the refinement of the seventeenth-century French aristocracy was based primarily on a culture of constraint.

Elias studies those elements and precepts of aristocratic sociability implying circumspection, moderation, and the suppression of affectivity in one’s speech, gestures, and behavior: not dipping one’s used spoon in a common platter, not blowing one’s nose

---

<sup>6</sup> Elias, *The Court Society*, 241: “In the French centralizing movement of the seventeenth century is formed the largest and most populous court unit in Europe which has effectively functioning central control.”

<sup>7</sup> Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 20: “Particularly important [...] is the diffusion of courtly-aristocratic manners, the tendency of the court aristocracy to assimilate and, so to speak, colonize elements from other classes.”

on one's sleeve, never showing one's true emotions as they are signs of weakness,<sup>8</sup> etc. Under the absolute monarchy, the aristocracy was compelled to seek power ironically by showing deference, currying favor, endeavoring to please, and dissimulating real thoughts and feelings.<sup>9</sup> The aristocrat according to Elias was thus the converse of the actor according to Denis Diderot in *Le paradoxe du comédien*: whereas the latter's performed emotivity concealed his rationality and inner composure, the former's controlled, moderate behavior dissimulated and restricted real emotion. According to Elias, the constraints entailing this aristocratic mask have since been assimilated and interiorized by all members of Western society, to the point that the distinction between social mask and true nature no longer exists. The historian Jacques Revel notes, however, that the assimilation of social codes into second nature was essential to aristocratic sociability already in the seventeenth century.<sup>10</sup> Revel cites from the *Réflexions sur le ridicule et sur le moyen de l'éviter* (1696) by Jean-Baptiste Morvan de Bellegarde: "[...] les Français se sont défaits peu à peu de tout ce qui a l'air de contrainte."<sup>11</sup> The dissimulation of social codes behind what was supposed to appear as natural behavior ideally implied their assimilation as second nature. "L'air de contrainte" disappeared precisely because these social constraints imposed from without had transformed into self-restraint felt from within. Elias contrasts this culture of constraint, dissimulation, and calculation with the more spontaneous and open emotivity and

---

<sup>8</sup> Elias, *The Court Society*, 110-111.

<sup>9</sup> Elias, *The Court Society*, 241: "Court aristocrats are often well aware that they wear a mask in their dealings with other people, even though they may not be aware that playing with masks has become second nature to them."

<sup>10</sup> Revel, "Les Usages de la civilité," 200.

<sup>11</sup> Revel, "Les Usages de la civilité," 203.

aggressivity of the feudal nobility. He qualifies the seventeenth-century French aristocracy as “the centre of the movement” that “gradually passed to broader strata.”<sup>12</sup> In his desire to relate sociogenesis and psychogenesis, Elias limits his portrayal of seventeenth-century French aristocratic culture to practices and attitudes suggestive of social constraint, which have generally been interpreted as typifying that culture.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Germaine de Staël-Holstein claims in *De la Littérature* that the French aristocracy of the Ancien Régime had “le plus de grace, de goût et de gaieté” in Europe, thanks to a powerful monarchy affording it “le loisir [...] très-favorable au perfectionnement des jouissances de l’esprit et de la conversation.”<sup>13</sup> In the same text, “la gaieté française” is also termed “la gaieté piquante.”<sup>14</sup> Staël is referring to the subtle French art of ridicule aimed at those who did not master “certaines règles de politesse et d’élégance.”<sup>15</sup> According to Staël, it is the fear of ridicule, this gaiety “piquante,” that impelled the French to develop their fine taste, “un genre de perspicacité singulièrement remarquable.”<sup>16</sup> Their refinement, based on their “crainte,”<sup>17</sup> constitutes for Staël a “caractère national.”<sup>18</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Elias should choose this specific society to epitomize aristocratic refinement and constraint.

---

<sup>12</sup> Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 99.

<sup>13</sup> Germaine de Staël-Holstein, *De la Littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, vol. 2 (Paris: Maradan, 1800), 32-45.

<sup>14</sup> Staël, *De la littérature*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Staël, *De la littérature*, 40.

<sup>16</sup> Staël, *De la littérature*, 41: “Obligés d’étudier sans cesse ce qui pouvoit nuire ou plaire en société, cet intérêt les rendoit très-observateurs.”

<sup>17</sup> Staël, *De la littérature*, 41.

<sup>18</sup> Staël, *De la littérature*, 32.

Though Elias's method has "produced a mixed response of strong opinions in Western sociological circles,"<sup>19</sup> his fundamental premise equating the seventeenth-century French aristocracy with a culture of constraint has generally gone unchallenged.<sup>20</sup> According to the literary historian Faith Beasely, recent French criticism devoted to seventeenth-century aristocratic sociability tends to concentrate on its complexity and subtlety:

The past ten years have witnessed the development of a vein of scholarship, both historical and literary, that attempts to analyze the uniquely French phenomenon of *politesse* and *galanterie*. The works of Alain Viala, Emmanuel Bury, Myriam Maître, Delphine Denis, and Elena Russo, among others, take these terms that had become rather empty clichés<sup>21</sup> and grant them much of the significance and complexity they had during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>22</sup>

Beasely situates this scholarly trend in the past decade, but it must be noted that historians of previous generations have similarly brought to light the intricacies of aristocratic sociability in seventeenth-century France, most notably Marc Fumaroli, Christoph Strosetzki, and Maurice Magendie. By insisting on social constraint, Elias is simultaneously emphasizing this culture's subtle refinement, and therefore adhering to a

---

<sup>19</sup> See Rojek, "Problems of Involvement and Detachment in the Writings of Norbert Elias" for a discussion of Elias's sociological method and its critical reception.

<sup>20</sup> Andreas Wehowsky and Carol Poore attribute the origin of the same psychological condition in current Western society rather to the social, commercial, and spiritual practices of the bourgeoisie during the Reformation. These critics do not call into question Elias's portrayal of seventeenth-century aristocracy; they only displace the sociogenesis in question to an earlier period and to a different social class. See "Making Ourselves More Flexible than We Are: Reflections on Norbert Elias."

<sup>21</sup> In his article "A Question of Manners: Status and Gender in Etiquette and Courtesy," Michael Curtin posits that traditionally, good manners and the observation of etiquette was indistinguishable from the development of virtue and the art of self-cultivation. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, according to Curtin, "the traditional association between manners and morals was broken." The rise of the middle class saw the appearance of the etiquette book intended for those eager to imitate outwardly the aristocratic lifestyle without necessarily cultivating their inner character. Good manners have since been depreciated, in Curtin's estimation, no longer considered as a mirror of virtue, but as mere formalities and "empty clichés," as Beasely terms them. I concur with Curtin's chronology: if in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, moralists like Blaise Pascal, Jean de La Bruyère, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Jean Baptiste de la Salle were denouncing the hypocrisy behind *politesse* and the divorce between good manners and good morals, they did so in a society still presuming a connection between the two.

<sup>22</sup> Beasely, *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France*, 177.

long-standing tradition of scholarship beginning before his work and continuing thereafter. This tradition, according to Beasley, is ideologically charged: by revealing the complexity of seventeenth-century French sociability, by arguing that its fine manners were not merely “empty clichés,” scholars are paying tribute to an exemplary aristocracy entailing one of the splendors of *le Grand Siècle*. This golden era in French history is essential “to France’s cultural heritage, and by extension to its concept of ‘Frenchness,’” as Beasley writes; “defining who and what influenced and created this period [...] still possesses, important political and cultural dimensions.”<sup>23</sup> The French actor Lorànt Deutsch eloquently describes this source of national pride as follows: “la France du grand siècle, à laquelle on se reporte, de laquelle on se réclame en permanence.”<sup>24</sup>

Elias claims that seventeenth-century French aristocratic sociability fostered “a compulsion to hold back one’s own feelings” in order to “harmonize” with one’s interlocutors,<sup>25</sup> from which stem current “fears experienced as shame and delicacy” associated with the “formation of the ‘super-ego.’”<sup>26</sup> Elias’s study presents a particular “vision” of the past and present.<sup>27</sup> He forges a connection between what he considers to be the grandeur of the past and the humility of the present, thus revealing the irony behind the “civilizing process.” In his indirect manner, Elias is also participating in a tradition of ideological glorification.

---

<sup>23</sup> Beasley, *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> “Interview: Le roi, l’écureuil et la couleuvre,” *Allocine.com*, Feb. 7, 2011, Mar. 5, 2011 <[http://www.allocine.fr/article/fichearticle\\_gen\\_carticle=18601493.html](http://www.allocine.fr/article/fichearticle_gen_carticle=18601493.html)>.

<sup>25</sup> Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 28-29.

<sup>26</sup> Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, xiii.

<sup>27</sup> See Smith, *Norbert Elias and Modern Social Theory*, 21: “Elias’s ‘way of looking’ expresses a powerful vision in the imagination. This vision contains a central tension: between involvement and detachment, between inhibition and expression, between being ‘part of’ and being ‘apart from’.”

Without seeking to contradict this tradition, I believe that the current study of aristocratic sociability in seventeenth-century France should not have to limit itself to the analysis of manners and protocols reinforcing this image of fastidiousness and constraint. Elias's history does not present the complete picture; the culture in question was not strictly one of social constraint. In the present study, I will show how spontaneity, enthusiasm, and naturalness were realities, or at least real possibilities, for seventeenth-century French aristocrats. As stated earlier with reference to Diderot, Elias's representation of aristocratic sociability suggests a type of performance. In the present study, I focus on aristocratic performance practices, both artistic and social, and on the dramatic representation of these practices during the seventeenth century. Through this exploration of aristocratic attitudes and approaches to performance, it will become clear that both constraint and freedom were integral to this culture, and that they were not always in opposition but could even complement each other.

If my portrayal of the seventeenth-century French aristocracy differs from that offered by Elias, it does reinforce an important aspect of his sociology. Elias maintains that the concepts of "politesse" and "civilité" were forms of "courtly self-consciousness" serving "to characterize the specific kind of behaviour through which this upper class felt itself different from all simpler and more primitive people."<sup>28</sup> The aristocracy developed its refined manners in order to distinguish itself from "simpler and more primitive people." Elias also maintains that it was through their contact that the socially "inferior" were motivated to imitate the socially "superior." It is therefore inferred from Elias's study that exposure between the classes had a dual effect of generating the culture of

---

<sup>28</sup> Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 34. See also Elias, *The Court Society*, 104: courtiers must "maintain towards all others the degree of distance befitting their status."



refinement and constraint and generalizing that culture throughout society. In his *Réflexions sur le ridicule*, Morvan de Bellegarde cites different social types who instigated the aristocratic desire for distinction through manners and who sought to imitate these manners: “Les bourgeois, les provinciaux, les pédans sont grand faiseurs de révérences: ils accablent le monde par leurs compliments éternels et par des civilités gênantes; ils font des embarras à toutes les portes; et il faut disputer une heure à qui passera le dernier.”<sup>29</sup> These people were ostracized because of their exaggerated, affected manner of following the “rules” of sociability. The same aristocratic desire for distinction can be observed vis-à-vis another group, that of professional performers. In their dramatic, musical, and poetic performances for each other, aristocrats were mindful of distinguishing their art from that of professional actors, singers, and buffoons.

The aristocracy came into contact with professional performers mostly by going to the theater or the opera, watching open-air performances (e.g., on the Pont Neuf in Paris), or hiring artists to perform at their residences. This contact generated in the aristocracy a certain ambivalence: the desire to practice and perform the same or similar arts, and the fear of resembling professional artists when they did so. As Elias points out, “aesthetic sensibility” was valued as a mark of aristocratic distinction.<sup>30</sup> It was not necessarily the professionals’ artistry, but rather their unflattering social image from which the refined amateurs sought distinction. Professional performers were commonly associated with various foibles and vices, ex-communicated by the French church, and socially marginalized. Aristocrats, wary of these negative associations, consciously

---

<sup>29</sup> Cited in Revel, “Les Usages de la civilité,” 203.

<sup>30</sup> Elias, *The Court Society*, 77.

distinguished their manner of performing from that of professionals. Social distinction thus manifested through performance practice. Moreover, just as Elias has observed the imitation of aristocratic manners by the bourgeoisie, I will show how in the late seventeenth century, the aristocratic manner of performing, particularly the art of conversation, became a subject of dramatic representation. My study thus demonstrates Elias's theory according to which the aristocracy's distinctive culture was generated vis-à-vis non-aristocrats, in this case, professional performers. These artists in turn drew inspiration from the aristocratic manner of performing.

Through this study of conversation and performance, I propose to interrogate current assumptions made about the seventeenth-century French aristocratic culture. My study will show that both constraint and freedom defined the aristocratic art of performing. It will also show how this art developed in order to distinguish aristocrats from socially marginalized professional performers, and that despite this desire for distinction, the aristocratic art of performing was also practiced on the professional stage. My study brings together the concepts of sociability and performance to present this aristocracy in a new light.

### ***Performance in Conversation, Conversation as Performance***

In seventeenth-century France, aristocratic culture articulated itself principally through the art of conversation, leisurely practiced in groups that historians generally refer to as "salons." I will present the salon as both historical reality and historiographical phenomenon later in this "Introduction." In the course of a given conversation among salonniers, a variety of vocal performance arts could take place, namely: song, poetic recitation from memory and through impromptu, voiced literary

reading and musical sight-reading, dramatic declamation, and comical impersonation. These divertissements were integral to the representation of an aristocratic ideal; they reflected the performers' cultural background, refined upbringing and taste, and innate artistic talent. My first three chapters are devoted to the artistic performance practices of salonniers in the course of conversation, itself a social performance. In their studies of performance practices among the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French elite, Anne-Madeleine Goulet and Antoine Lilti suggest that artistic performance and the construction of one's social image were perfectly compatible and mutually beneficial.<sup>31</sup> The first three chapters of my study have developed from a different premise: though these performance arts were used to cultivate and represent an aristocratic ideal, they could present certain social risks for the polite performer. These risks were managed through strategies entailing constraints and/or liberties distinctive of aristocratic performance.

My first chapter will address the principal risk in any salon performance: that of affectation. Any effort manifested in performance risked being interpreted by one's interlocutors as affectation. Affectation, or conspicuous artifice, implied an exaggerated desire to impress that clashed with the aristocratic aesthetics and ethics of ease and naturalness. My first chapter will reveal that in seventeenth-century salons, the key to an unaffected performance was the demonstration of the performer's pleasure.

---

<sup>31</sup> Goulet, *Poésie, musique et sociabilité au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 699: The *air sérieux* entails "une présentation de soi en accord avec les critères de l'élégance, de la distinction et du bon goût [...] l'air proclame des principes de moralité civile fondés sur la mesure et la modération, s'appuyant sur la notion de naturel, la bienséance, la politesse, et l'enjouement, une morale du plaisir." Lilti, *Le monde des salons*, 259: "Les femmes, notamment, y trouvaient l'occasion de briller, de se donner en spectacle en toute innocence, de faire admirer leur voix, leur visage, leur maintien, leur talent de comédienne ou de musicienne."

Aristocratic pleasure in seventeenth-century France has been the object of much recent historical criticism. According to Kathryn Hoffman and Georgia Cowart, this society functioned principally through the giving of pleasure. The ability to please was itself a source of pleasure, pride, and power. The most famous example is Louis XIV's strategy of subjugating his courtiers by entertaining them through lavish *divertissements*. Staël attributed the superiority of French taste during the Ancien Régime to a "desir de plaire universel"<sup>32</sup>: in aristocratic society, the more one endeavored to please (without affectation, of course), the better one's speech and appearance, thus creating higher aspirations and expectations in everyone's social performance. Furthermore, as Molière and Pierre Corneille attested, the merit of a literary or dramatic work depended largely on its ability to please the refined reader or spectator, and not strictly on its observation of traditional aesthetic rules preached by the pedants.<sup>33</sup> Cowart rightfully states that the French aristocracy of the Ancien Régime "used pleasure as an icon of its identity."<sup>34</sup> My study contributes to this critical discourse by revealing the importance of manifesting one's own pleasure in aristocratic society, particularly during an act of performance. Pleasure was not only procured through spectacle; it was an important spectacle in itself. This manifest pleasure distinguished the aristocratic performer from the professional stage performer stereotypically associated with affectation and a desperate desire to please. If Elias associates the seventeenth-century French aristocracy with a culture of

---

<sup>32</sup> Staël, *De la littérature*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> The *honnête homme* Dorante functions as Molière's spokesman when he implores in *La Critique de l'École des Femmes* (vi): "Laissons-nous aller de bonne foi aux choses qui nous prennent par les entrailles, et ne cherchons point de raisonnements pour nous empêcher d'avoir du plaisir." During "la querelle du *Cid*" Corneille vindicates his work by citing the pleasure it procures his public, parting from the authority of Aristotelian poetics with his famous "Je ne dois qu'à moi seul toute ma renommée."

<sup>34</sup> Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 48.

constraint, my first chapter will show that this same society accorded much importance, on the contrary, to the freedom of enjoying one's performing self.

In my second chapter, I will show that the choice between artistic freedom and polite self-restraint was not always clear-cut and exclusive in salon culture. This chapter focuses on three types of performance: physical comedy, ridicule through the art of impersonation, and the representation of passion. These practices threatened to compromise the performer's social image by suggesting a lack of refinement, malice, and immodesty, respectively, all of which were vices commonly attributed to buffoons and stage artists. Physical comedy risked disgracing the performer. Still, certain salonniers preferred to boldly "*entrer dans le ridicule*" than to perform in a reserved and awkward manner for fear of embarrassing themselves; such fear was a self-fulfilling prophecy. Secondly, an impersonation risked making the performer appear both ridiculous and malicious. By dismissing or even apologizing for their impersonations, salonniers could safeguard their moral image and, ironically, deride more freely. Finally, according to primary sources by men but strangely not by women, the representation of passion by a salonnière during the act of singing, declaiming, or reciting suggested a lack of modesty. Were the men's portrayals of female performance a manner of imposing modesty on salonnières? An ambiguity exists between portrayal and reality: it is difficult to know which approach, reticent or uninhibited, recounted by men or women, typified the artistic representation of passion by salonnières. In all of these socially risky artistic performances, the degrees of constraint and liberty seem to have depended on the sensibility of the performer and of the people observing her. It would therefore be

erroneous to assume that seventeenth-century French aristocratic culture defined itself through either one of these qualities.

My third chapter interrogates common assumptions made about the principal performance art of the seventeenth-century salon: the art of conversation. “La Conversation” in seventeenth-century France was not just conversation, but a veritable social institution. Interlocutors consciously and collectively entered into a special mode of verbal and non-verbal comportment and communication according to the dictates of politesse. The slightest faux pas in one’s demeanor, pronunciation, vocal inflexion, word choice, or choice of topic could lead to long-lasting discredit in the eyes of one’s interlocutors and of anyone to whom they may recount the incident. It was thus conceived and approached as a veritable performance art, the social stakes of which were high. It is commonly assumed that the art of conversation required perpetual and intense self-control, dissimulated behind a natural, spontaneous air. This social aesthetic termed *le naturel* distinguished salon culture from the artifices and formalities of court etiquette. Elias does not differentiate between the salon and the court in his studies of the aristocracy, presumably because he equates both with a culture of constraint. *Le naturel* of the salon was a social performance serving to mask this reality of constraint.

My third chapter offers a different vision of the seventeenth-century French salon. It was possible for salonniers to escape the ambiguity of *le naturel*; constraint did not always masquerade as naturalness. Unlike Elias, certain then-contemporary theorists of polite sociability did not consider self-control and spontaneous self-expression to be mutually exclusive. By openly being themselves in their carefully controlled social performance, salonniers could distinguish themselves from theatrical actors, who were

equated with the wearing of masks and duplicity. On the other hand, the salon did not always call for apparent naturalness. The social practice of gallantry mediating the rapport between the sexes was openly recognized as artificial and performed. A *galant* was understood to be only playing a role out of politeness toward his interlocutress. Therefore, contrary to what is generally presumed about salon culture, on the one hand, naturalness was not always just a façade, and on the other hand, the artificial constraints of sociability were not always dissimulated. At the end of my third chapter, a comparison between the salon arts of conversation, poetic recitation, and impromptu, implying spontaneity in communication, recollection, and composition, respectively, will serve to reveal the nuances of feint and genuineness, constraint and naturalness in salon culture.

Thus aristocrats in seventeenth-century France used performance art to experience and manifest sheer pleasure, to temporarily abandon the noble qualities of dignity, mildness, and affective moderation, and to dare to be themselves spontaneously in front of their peers. My study of salon performance practices suggests that circumspection, constraint, and “fear” did not always underlie “la gaité française,” contrary to what Staël and later Elias suggest. I will show that this society was capable of a degree of naturalness, spontaneity, and sheer pleasure that has been generally neglected by historians. Certain performance situations allowed for affective and/or artistic freedom, others demanded more restraint, and still others paradoxically called for both. In all of these situations, salonnières endeavored to distinguish themselves from professional performers who were commonly associated with affectation, crudeness, malice,

immodesty, and duplicity. The salon was a dance between constraint and freedom serving to distinguish and define the performing aristocracy.

### ***Conversations in Performance***

Salon conversation was not only a social performance serving as a context for artistic performances among the elite; it also had repercussions on dramatic art in the seventeenth century. In the final two chapters of my study, I will examine the dramatic representation of salon conversations in works by two playwrights, the amateur Françoise d'Aubigné, marquise de Maintenon, second wife of Louis XIV and director of the École de Saint-Cyr for young noble ladies, and the professional playwright and actor Molière. Each author's dramatic art draws inspiration from the art of conversation and at the same time offers a critical perspective on this social performance vis-à-vis theatrical performance.

Maintenon's brief *Conversations* for enactment by her students were intended to teach them how to speak properly and politely among themselves and in preparation for social commerce in adulthood. Whereas young people normally learned the art of conversation by passively observing adults and endeavoring to imitate what they heard and saw, Maintenon's students, isolated behind the walls of Saint-Cyr, were given a unique opportunity: this art could be learned more effectively through dramatic imitation, not of adults, but of fictional characters representing idealized versions of the same students. These *Conversations* called for both free expression and self-restraint on the part of the student performers. They provided the students the opportunity to express themselves openly, frankly, and even defiantly through dramatic enactment. At the same time, Maintenon used these enactments to correct her students, to impose constraints on



their manner of speaking and perhaps even thinking. Through the *Conversations*, Maintenon also endeavored to forge a dramatic performance style that was more discreet, “natural,” and less “affected” than in her students’ grandiose stage productions, most famously that of *Esther* by Jean Racine. Maintenon used her *Conversations* to render dramatic performance respectable and tastefully moderate for young ladies, underscoring the distinction between their aristocratic air and the excesses of professional stage actresses.

Molière, on the other hand, sought to reveal the affinities between the performance of conversation and theatrical performance. His dramatic representations emphasized the formalities and artifices underlying the apparent ease and naturalness of conversation. His polite interlocutors were not really communicating, but rather performing the ideal of aristocracy for each other, paying more attention to how they expressed themselves according to social protocols than to what they were saying. Thus Molière’s real actors were representing fictional characters who were consciously acting for each other, a form of *mise en abyme* or “superperformance” particular to Molière’s theater. Like Maintenon, Molière forged a dramatic acting style based on the codes and constraints of civility, distinct from the vocal and corporeal conventions of theatrical declamation. However, just as he confounded real stage actor and fictional social actor through the superperformance of conversation, Molière revealed similarities between the vices of professional stage acting and those of polite social acting. The identification between real actor and polite character was more problematic and provocative in Molière’s theater than in Maintenon’s. The same vices commonly projected onto professional stage actors, namely affectation, immodesty, malice, and duplicity, were

demonstrated by his onstage salonniers, suggesting that the performance of aristocracy, despite its pretensions, could not deny its affinity with professional performance.

In this study, I will thus investigate the rich, problematic relationship between performance arts and the art of sociability in seventeenth-century France, and this investigation will bring to light the importance of both constraint and freedom in defining and distinguishing aristocratic identity. From artistic performances within conversation, through conversation as a performance art, I will finally turn to conversations represented in dramatic works. This study's structure thus resembles an image (performance in conversation) reflected in a mirror (conversation as performance) yielding its inversion (conversation in performance). I aim to further our understanding of aristocratic sociability in seventeenth-century France, to compare dramatic and musical performance practices in polite society and those of the professional stage, to uncover forgotten arts specific to early modern aristocratic culture (e.g., voiced reading, sight-reading of musical parody, impersonation, dramatic declamation<sup>35</sup>), to use the study of male and female performance practices to shed light on the rapport between the sexes in the seventeenth-century French aristocracy, to reveal the artistic qualities, pedagogical strategy, and social pertinence of Maintenon's *Conversations*, and to consider hitherto ignored aspects of Molière's comedy of manners.

---

<sup>35</sup> According to Lilti, *Le monde des salons*, 250: "En l'absence de travaux probants, il semble que les témoignages soient beaucoup plus rares sur les pratiques théâtrales mondaines au dix-septième siècle" vis-à-vis the eighteenth century. My study reveals, however, that seventeenth-century accounts of dramatic performance practices among the elite, both tragic and comic, are not lacking and that these practices contributed significantly to the establishment of one's social image.

### ***The Telling Detail: Teasing Out Reality from Myth***

In this study of seventeenth-century French salon culture, it is important to first acknowledge the challenge of distinguishing between what this culture actually was and the various myths generated by and around it. When the chevalier de Méré described the quality of *honnêteté*, it is unclear whether he was referring to a real social phenomenon or an evasive social ideal. Furthermore, it cannot be said that Madeleine de Scudéry's *Conversations* were idealistic and therefore unrepresentative of real salon culture, for her aristocratic contemporaries recognized themselves, or wanted to recognize themselves, in these fictional idealizations.<sup>36</sup> Am I tracing real practices or evoking ideals from the seventeenth century? I believe I am doing both, for aristocratic sociability was conceived of as an art, that is, a practice in search of an ideal. Real salon culture was itself idealizing, making the frontier between reality and myth virtually meaningless.

Still, this culture did entail concrete performance practices, and I aim to tease out historical reality from myth. In order to do so, my investigatory strategy has been to consult a wide variety of sources. My approach is similar to that of Kathryn Hoffman in *Society of Pleasures*, her “intertextual and interdisciplinary” study of pleasure in seventeenth-century French culture. Hoffman discerns “across genre boundaries [...] patterns of pleasure, repetitions of practices and the developments of politics at the sites where disciplinary borders meet and intermingle.” Her corpus is a “mixture of the known and the marginal [...] from different areas of the early-modern cultural matrix.”<sup>37</sup> I have

---

<sup>36</sup> Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 15: “[Scudéry’s] novels inspired the court with renewed pride and enthusiasm for the noble life.” See also Revel, “Les Usages de la civilité,” 196: Scudéry’s writings “renvoient à cette microsociété sa propre image.”

<sup>37</sup> Hoffmann, *Society of Pleasures*, 1.

assembled a miscellaneous corpus of primary sources that represent salon culture or were produced by that culture: manuals, treatises, essays, and other theoretical writings describing and prescribing salon comportment; fictions including novels and plays; chronicles, memoirs, and letters recounting real salon encounters; scores of music performed in salons; and iconographic representations of salonnières. No source in isolation can be considered adequately representative of salon culture, but if “patterns” and “repetitions” are observed through a wide variety of genres, styles, representational and rhetorical strategies, and authorial perspectives and biases, it is reasonable to interpret those elements as reflections of reality. As Pierre Force explains in *Molière ou Le Prix des choses*: “Tout point de vue sur un auteur constitue, à certains égards, un contresens, mais si l’on compare ces erreurs de lecture, on peut parvenir à une vision plus juste de l’objet observé, tout comme les cartographes calculent l’altitude des montagnes en comparant leur élévation apparente depuis plusieurs points de vue.”<sup>38</sup> The greater the diversity of primary sources, the more meaningful the consistencies between them.

With regard to the performance arts practiced in seventeenth-century French salons, the amount of information that can be collected from primary sources varies from one practice to another. The art of conversation is the subject of numerous treatises, manuals, theoretical writings, and fictional representations from that period. The art of singing among salonnières is detailed in a handful of treatises, most famously by Bénigne de Bacilly. Jean Léonor Le Gallois de Grimarest has provided the only theoretical work prescribing the art of declaiming, reciting poetry from memory, and reading aloud in polite society. However, reliance on theoretical sources alone would limit one’s

---

<sup>38</sup> Force, *Molière ou Le Prix des choses*, 8.

understanding of these arts. As stated earlier, aristocratic performance cannot be reduced to a set of rules; one must often read between the lines of prescriptions in order to perceive actual practice. It is also critical to branch out and glean telling details from other primary sources in order to confirm, complement, or relativize what is prescribed by theorists. The performance art of poetic impromptu, for example, does not appear in the theoretical literature of the period, apart from a brief mention in *L'Art poétique* by Nicolas Boileau. In order to bring the art of impromptu to light, I have therefore collected passages from a novel by Michel de Pure, Bacilly's treatise on singing, a chronicle of Madeleine de Scudéry's real salon gatherings, and a fictional portrayal of a salon conversation by Scudéry. By comparing and contrasting these passages, it is possible to reconstruct to a certain degree this lost aristocratic performance art.

Even when an art is the object of much theoretical writing, it is important to keep an eye out for passing details in unlikely sources. Treatises dedicated to the art of song, for example, do not differentiate aesthetically, affectively, and socially between an *air galant* and an *air passionné* in salon performance. One must refer to the conclusion of Scudéry's fictional "Conversation de l'Histoire de la poésie française" to uncover these nuances. Performances of each are offered by two salonnières with distinct artistic capabilities, social strategies, and affective propensities. The two musical performances are not central to this conversation recounting the lives of the most famous French poets since the Renaissance. Scudéry's description of the salonnières' performances is accessorial, and therein lies its tremendous value for my investigation. Scudéry wants her contemporary readers to imagine that such a conversation has taken place or could take place. It is precisely through the passing details that she assures the realism of her

fictional salon; they excite recognition. As Scudéry asserts in her “Conversation de la manière d’inventer une fable,” appearing the eighth volume of her novel *Clélie*, fiction is only believable when peppered with “ces fondements historiques qu’on entrevoit partout, et qui font recevoir le mensonge mêlé avec la vérité.”<sup>39</sup> I endeavor to identify those incidental details serving to imbue fictional texts with an air of realism, or “vérité.” They often provide precious information about real practices that are not found in theoretical sources.

Thus my approach is markedly different from that of the historian Antoine Lilti, who excludes fictional and didactic sources from his significant study of eighteenth-century French salon culture. Lilti is skeptical about information found in “les traités qui en édictent les règles et les préceptes” and in “les fictions de conversation, dont on ne sait pas toujours très bien de quelles conversations [...] elles sont les fictions.” He opts rather for “les correspondances, mémoires, récits, remarques” describing salon gatherings that actually took place.<sup>40</sup> I appreciate Lilti’s circumspection with regard to the distortions in textual representations of real practice. Still, even journalistic accounts that seem the most objective have their representational strategy favoring certain elements and excluding others. As the literary historian Patrick Dandrey eloquently states in *Molière ou L’esthétique du ridicule*, “Toute imitation suppose en effet un tri [...] [une] sélection nécessaire.”<sup>41</sup> In order to understand how salonniers really performed for each other in the seventeenth century, I first recognize that any primary source representing or

---

<sup>39</sup> Scudéry, “*De l’air galant*” et autres *Conversations*, 169.

<sup>40</sup> Lilti, *Le Monde des salons*, 274.

<sup>41</sup> Dandrey, *Molière ou L’esthétique du ridicule*, 16.

reflecting these practices is a “mensonge mêlé avec la vérité;” the trick is to distinguish between the two by examining each source in my corpus in light of all others. I have thus endeavored to open my investigation into diverse genres, to identify intertextual patterns throughout them, and to discern what I believe to be real historical practice reflected in incidental details.

What I have gleaned in this manner about performance practices and attitudes toward performance in seventeenth-century French salon culture is interpreted in my first three chapters. I then use the content of these chapters to inform my studies of Maintenon’s and Molière’s dramatic representations of salon culture in the final two chapters.

### ***Introducing the Salon***

My study is entitled “Conversation and Performance in Seventeenth-Century French *Salon* Culture.” The use of the term “salon,” particularly in a seventeenth-century French context, requires some explanation and justification. Indeed, aristocratic sociability did not define itself by an all-encompassing term such as “salon.” According to the historian Roger Duchêne, the idea of the “salon” in a seventeenth-century context is a modern construct which “corresponds in part with historical realities, but above all with our own ideas,” not unlike the concepts of the Baroque, Classicism, and Preciosity.<sup>42</sup> I must therefore explain what I mean by the word “salon” and justify its use in my study.

Technically speaking, the use of the word “salon” in a seventeenth-century context is not anachronistic. According to Duchêne, this word appeared for the first time in Jean Loret’s *Gazette* of 1664 to signify a large hall (from *salone* in Italian) for lavish

---

<sup>42</sup> Duchêne, “De la chambre au salon,” 22.

receptions and banquets, and for theatrical and musical performances.<sup>43</sup> At present, the term is more commonly associated with an eighteenth-century socio-cultural phenomenon. Designating both an architectural space and the human activity associated with that space, a salon is thought to refer to a sumptuous hall in a residence where numerous guests exchange political, scientific and philosophical ideas and collectively enjoy works of art and literature. However, contrary to popular belief, the term “salon” was not used in this manner even during the eighteenth century, as Lilti points out.<sup>44</sup> The very term is problematic in an early modern context, despite its common use among historians who are still endeavoring to understand why, how, and in what circumstances aristocratic sociability took place during the Ancien Régime.

Admittedly, the “salon” is a catchall word used to represent our variable, unstable notion of this sociability. Though the term in a seventeenth-century context seems to suggest a parlor or small living room reserved for polite conversation with one’s guests, any spatial specificity related to this activity is difficult to pinpoint. In private residences, various spaces were reserved for conversation: a small room (*cabinet*), parlor or alcove,

---

<sup>43</sup> Duchêne, “De la chambre au salon,” 21. See also Donneau de Visé, *Le Mercure galant*, 1674/5, 48-49: “on servit une Collation de viandes & de fruits pour Monsieur & Madame, & pour vingt Femmes de la plus haute Qualité. Les Violons divertirent d’autant plus pendant ce magnifique Repas, qu’ils estoient placez dans un Salon fort propre à bien faire entendre de pareils Instruments, & qui en multiplioit les sons.”

<sup>44</sup> Lilti, *Le Monde des salons*. It should also be noted that Denis Diderot’s *Salons* composed in the 1760’s refer to the art exhibitions that the Académie royale hosted every other year in the “Salon carré du Louvre.” The term in this context refers to an architectural and decorative space, as described in the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1694, 1762): “Piece dans un appartement qui est beaucoup plus exhaussee que les autres, & qui est ordinairement ceintrée & enrichie d’ornements d’architecture & de peinture.” However, in the fifth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1798) appears a secondary connotation evoking social interaction and intimacy of space: “On appelle aussi Salon, Une pièce qui ne sert ni de cabinet, ni de chambre à coucher, où l’on peut se réunir; et l’on dit, *Un joli salon, un petit salon*.”



the space between a hostess's daybed and the wall (*ruelle*<sup>45</sup>). These domestic spaces were generally characterized by their intimacy and confined nature. However, polite conversation could take place virtually anywhere: in private or in public, in a large room, at a dinner table, during a promenade at Court (Figure I) or outside, sitting under the shade of a tree, etc.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, a single conversation could change settings, from a hostess's chamber to the dinner table as in *La Critique de l'École des femmes* or a refreshing promenade as in *Le Misanthrope* by Molière. Conversations taking place in a public space constituted performances not only between interlocutors but also for bystanders.<sup>47</sup> Scudéry's "Conversation de l'espérance" takes place in a public park; during this conversation, the interlocutor Philiste sings "admirablement bien [...] en se promenant avec toute la compagnie," apparently indifferent to her performance's exposure to a wider public.<sup>48</sup> What seems to have qualified the seventeenth-century salon was therefore not its physical setting, but rather the activity of conversation<sup>49</sup> practiced within a group of interlocutors, referred to as a "cercle." It often included members of

---

<sup>45</sup> During the seventeenth century, the term "ruelle" commonly functioned as a metonym for the activity of polite conversation and for the group of people engaged in this activity. However, because it no longer carries these connotations, I have decided not to use the term systematically throughout my study.

<sup>46</sup> For example, see Sorel, *Les Recréations galantes*, 102 for a conversation in a large hall; La Bruyère, *Les Caractères*, 42 for conversations at feasts; Scudéry, "Conversation de l'Espérance" in *Conversations morales*, 1:79 for a conversation during a promenade in a public park; and de Pure, *La Précieuse*, 2:425-427 for a conversation under the shade of a tree.

<sup>47</sup> See de Pure, *La Précieuse*, 2:421, 425. A group of ladies converse differently between their promenade in public and their secluded resting spot: "Elles se rendirent dans les lieux les plus propres à la promenade & à l'admiration de toutes sortes de beautés [...] elles errèrent assez long-temps occupées à regarder, & à se faire regarder; à divertir leurs yeux & ceux d'autrui; à juger des uns & des autres, & à essayer les divers jugemens que l'on faisoit d'elles. Elles s'aviserent d'aller chercher quelque endroit plus solitaire, où elles pussent trouver du repos, & donner relâche à ces soins que le public & le monde oblige de prendre de soy-mesme. Elles donnerent dans un endroit du bois [...]"

<sup>48</sup> Scudéry, "Conversation de l'Espérance" in *Conversations morales*, 1:79.

<sup>49</sup> See Goldsmith, "L'art de détourner les choses," 45: "Salon society came to be defined not so much by a concrete space as by its occupants' principal activity, conversation."

the nobility, haute bourgeoisie, and those who sought their favor (e.g., artists, writers, clergymen), all engaged in the representation of aristocracy and friendship among them. In a word, the salon was not a place but a practice.

Still, the notion of a seventeenth-century conversation circle remains vague. How many people did a conversation circle include? According to Scudéry, the art of conversation was at its best when practiced within a group that was neither too small nor too large. It entailed a single dialogue in which any of its members could intervene while the others listened attentively.<sup>50</sup> Did this discursive setup reflect the reality of salon sociability or was it idealistic? The real conversation circles evoked in the periodical *Le Mercure galant* include as many as ten to twelve participants,<sup>51</sup> and this number can oscillate during a gathering in a public space.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, all of René Bary's model conversations in *L'esprit de cour, ou Les conversations galantes, divisées en cent dialogues*, take place between only two people. In the frontispiece of Pierre Ortigue de Vaumorière's *L'art de plaire dans la conversation* (Figure II), a small group of people are sitting in a circle; however, the interlocutors are divided into pairs engaged in

---

<sup>50</sup> Scudéry, "Conversation de l'oisiveté, et de l'ingratitude" in *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 385: "[...] les Conversations qui se font entre des Personnes choisies, dont le nombre n'est pas fort grand, sont les plus agreables de toutes [...]" In *Le Mercure galant*, polite conversation is often said to take place within a "peloton," understood as a small number of people gathered together.

<sup>51</sup> Donneau de Visé, *Le Mercure galant*, 1673/3, 371-372: "Je me rencontray dernièrement chez une Personne de la plus haute qualité, dont le cercle estoit composé de deux Duchesses, & de dix ou douze autres Personnes qui n'estoient que d'un rang au dessous"; 1674/6, 207: "M'estant dernièrement rencontré dans une Ruelle assez bien remplie, il s'y trouva quatre Femmes moins jeunes que les autres [...] Une de ces vieilles Mignonnes voyant beaucoup de jeunes Gens dans la compagnie, & que l'on croyoit tous fort amoureux, leur demanda audience [...]"

<sup>52</sup> Donneau de Visé, *Le Mercure galant*, 1673/2, 111-112: "A peine eut-il achevé ces paroles, que le peloton s'éclaircit tout d'un coup: Les Curieux impertinens qui n'estoient point connus de ceux de la Compagnie ordinaire, allerent chacun de leur costé; & ceux qui estoient au milieu, estans déchargés des fardeaux qu'il avoient sur leurs épaules, commencerent à reprendre haleine, & à respirer un peu."

simultaneous conversations.<sup>53</sup> The seventeenth-century salon thus seems to have been characterized by a discursive flexibility. Conversation was free to engage an entire group, the members of which were free to come and go, and to divide itself into private exchanges within that group.

The salon's flexibility was not only spatial and discursive, but temporal as well. In his study of eighteenth-century salons, Lilti maintains that regularity in scheduling<sup>54</sup> was a tradition dating from the seventeenth century, citing the Saturday gatherings at Scudéry's residence. In *Le Mercure galant*, Donneau de Visé describes one salon as a "petite Academie Galante," the regularity of which is in playful imitation of learned *académies*.<sup>55</sup> More commonly, however, the art of conversation was practiced in the seventeenth century not according to a strict schedule, but when polite interlocutors were assembled by chance, common consent, or surprise (e.g., Climène's arrival in *La Critique de L'École des femmes* by Molière), whether at someone's residence, during a promenade outside, or even at court.

Historians do not seem to agree on the exact relation between seventeenth-century court culture and salon culture. It is generally thought that in the first part of the seventeenth century, salon culture developed at several distinguished Parisian residences,

---

<sup>53</sup> Scudéry does acknowledge the tendency for conversation circles to divide into pairs. See her "Dédicace à Madame la Dauphine, en guise de Dialogue" in *Conversations sur divers sujets*, iv: "Les Dames et les Galants se parlaient par troupes, au lieu de se séparer deux et deux, comme il arrive assez souvent."

<sup>54</sup> Lilti, *Le Monde des salons*, 65: "Un dîner occasionnel ne suffit pas à faire le salon. Celui-ci implique une certaine régularité qui assure la pérennité des rencontres et la constitution d'un groupe d'habitues"; 66: "le jour fixe était déjà un élément important d'institutionnalisation de ces pratiques de sociabilité."

<sup>55</sup> Donneau de Visé, *Le Mercure galant*, 1674/6, 24-26: "huit ou dix Personnes des plus spirituelles de Paris, de l'une & de l'autre Sexe, ont depuis peu formé une espece de petite Academie Galant, qu'ils s'assemblent une fois chaque Semaine, & que les jours qui sont choisis pour s'entretenir, l'Assemblée n'est ouverte que par un Discours qui regarde l'Amour. Comme chacun doit parler à son tour, on tira au sort lors que l'on crea cette nouvelle Academie, pour sçavoir qui parleroit le premier. Monsieur de \*\*\* eut cet avantage, & voicy le sujet sur lequel il fit son Discours [...]"

most famously at the hôtel de Rambouillet, as a more peaceful and refined alternative to the rambunctious court culture surrounding Louis XIII.<sup>56</sup> However, in 1630 Nicolas Faret paints a more flattering picture of conversations at court “lorsque les reynes tiennent le Cercle” and praises the salon of Marie de Médicis, “ce divin cercle, dans lequel on peut dire que se trouve le vray centre de toutes les perfections de l’esprit & du corps.”<sup>57</sup> Though Faret’s praise of the queen mother and her conversation circle is politically motivated, it does throw a shadow of doubt on the supposed distinction between salon refinement and the crudeness of the court in the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Basing her assertions on those of the sociologist Jürgen Habermas, Deana Goodman argues that the salon was a private realm in which interlocutors could express and exchange political thought more freely than at court, where auto-censure and secrecy reigned.<sup>58</sup> The public representations of Louis XIV’s private life, symbolizing transparency between himself and his courtiers, were themselves highly formalized, strategic, illusory constructs. The private salon thus paradoxically allowed for more public, open dialogue than the public court and its culture of generalized scrutiny and dissimulation under the absolute monarch, himself the principal observer and spectacle at court.

---

<sup>56</sup> See in particular Magne, *Voiture et les origines de l’Hôtel de Rambouillet, 1597-1635* and Revel, “Les Usages de la civilité,” 194: “Contre la cour du roi, réprouvé pour sa rudesse, son ostentation et ses excès, une sociabilité restreinte et policed se définit dans les élites fermées qu’accueillent quelques grandes maisons nobles parisiennes, dont la plus célèbre est l’hôtel de Rambouillet.”

<sup>57</sup> Faret, *L’Honneste homme*, 221, 224.

<sup>58</sup> In her article “Public Sphere and Private Life,” Goodman focuses on French society from the end of seventeenth century to the Revolution; however the distinctions she makes between the court and the salons pertain more generally to the Ancien Régime. See also Revel, “Les Usages de la civilité,” 195-196: “La cour est un espace public, fortement hiérarchisé et réglé sous l’autorité toujours plus lourde du souverain.”

Though the differences evoked by Goodman between salon and court cultures are compelling, the similarities between them also merit attention. Louis XIV's court culture rivaled the refinement of Parisian salon culture, inspiring Madeleine de Scudéry, author and protégée of the king, to equate the elegance of conversations “à la Ville ou à la Cour.”<sup>59</sup> Moreover, if the chevalier de Méré complains that one is more concerned with one's appearance than with the quality of one's conversation at Court,<sup>60</sup> he elsewhere concedes that the Court attains perfection in the art of conversation “sous ce grand Prince que le monde admire [Louis XIV], et que les vrais Agrémens n'abandonnent point.”<sup>61</sup> In his *Caractères* “de la Cour,” Jean de La Bruyère evokes conversation circles in which courtier interlocutors tell stories, jokes, and endeavor to promote their interests through strategic “caresses.”<sup>62</sup> Still, I do not agree with Jacques Revel who maintains that Parisian salon culture during the beginning of the seventeenth century was subsequently supplanted by the court culture of Louis XIV, a “sociabilité réglée qui s'impose massivement.”<sup>63</sup> Rather, a certain rivalry seems to have existed in the second half of the

---

<sup>59</sup> Scudéry, “Conversation de l'ennui sans sujet” in *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets*, 470-471: according to the character Clorélise, “les occupations agréables et diverses des femmes [...] donnent lieu d'attendre sans ennui qu'on retourne à la Ville ou à la Cour” in order to resume their conversations.

<sup>60</sup> Méré, “Discours de la conversation,” 2:122, 123: “[dans les Maisons Royales], les entretiens en sont fort interrompus; on y va moins pour discourir, que pour se montrer. C'est-là qu'on fait des révérences de bonne grace; et c'est encore là, qu'on songe plus à paroître bien mis & bien ajusté, qu'à estre honneste homme [...] il faut considérer la Cour & le grand Monde séparément [...] on est tousjours si occupé des choses qui paroissent dans une Cour éclatante & pompeuse, qu'on n'y fait point de réflexions.” Nota: unless otherwise stated, all citations of Méré in my study are taken from his *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Fernand Roches, 1930).

<sup>61</sup> Méré, “Discours de l'esprit,” 2:75.

<sup>62</sup> La Bruyère, *Les Caractères*, 204-205, 208-209.

<sup>63</sup> Revel, “Les Usages de la civilité,” 197.

century between salon culture outside of the court and another one developing inside of it.

Certain historians question the social ideals with which seventeenth-century salon culture is currently associated and through which it is dissociated from court culture. According to Myriam Maître, “La sociabilité mondaine mixte & harmonieuse est [...] un mythe aussi actif que celui de la préciosité: l’imagerie idyllique arcadienne d’une société de conversation libérée de tout conflit et de toute tension d’ordre politique et sexuel hante la critique des salons.”<sup>64</sup> Maître contends that salons did not eliminate political and sexual tensions between interlocutors. In order to manage these tensions, salonnières were obliged to wear a social mask just as much as courtiers.<sup>65</sup> Marc Fumaroli demonstrates the same skepticism regarding the ideals of friendship, sincerity, and apolitical simplicity bonding salonnières:

Et le critère d’appartenance à ce monde de ‘bonne compagnie,’ ce n’est pas l’amitié, la soif commune de vérité de bonheur, c’est le respect de conventions formelles dans les rapports sociaux et dans le dialogue, les manières civiles qui supposent moins une convergence des cœurs et des esprits qu’une suppression des arêtes de l’amour-propre et des passions, pour faire à chacun sa place et à tous un rôle agréable. L’art de la conversation, soumis à la civilité, n’efface pas les rivalités, ne déracine pas les passions: elle leur impose une règle du jeu commune qui rend la lutte des amours-propres plus indirect, plus pointue sous l’harmonie apparente des gestes et des voix.

[...] on s’y tient informé des affaires politiques, diplomatiques, et militaires, religieuses aussi, et même si l’on est privé de toute voix délibérative ou décisionnelle dans l’État, on tient d’assez près à son haut personnel pour influencer directement sur les décisions [...] L’art de la conversation mondaine permet de toucher sans appuyer, dans un cercle ou dans un aparté, à des questions d’actualité.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Maître, *Les précieuses*, 430.

<sup>65</sup> The historian Antoine Lilti justifiably questions the stereotypical distinction between the “identités rigides du ‘moi’ courtisan, engoncé dans le cérémonial et la volonté de puissance” and the “identités urbaines protéiformes, façonnées par l’art égalitaire de la conversation” in eighteenth-century French society. See Lilti, *Le Monde des salons*, 73. Lilti attributes this myth principally to a post-revolutionary historical interpretation: “Cette opposition [...] puise sa force dans l’image de ‘salons des Lumières’ nécessairement hostiles à l’absolutisme et à la Cour [...] une cour hiérarchique et conservatrice auraient fait face des salons égalitaires, libéraux et ouverts.” I believe it is equally justifiable to extend Lilti’s questioning to the seventeenth century.

<sup>66</sup> Fumaroli, “*Otium, Convivium, Sermo*,” 45.

The art of conversation, whether at court or away from court, required its participants to play along in a performance of sociability that was not without its political stakes and strategies. It demanded a detached, rational, strategic approach on the part of each interlocutor, according to Maître, Fumaroli, and Elias who, it is recalled, refuses to distinguish between the court and the salon. These critics would undoubtedly agree that regardless of social setting, the aristocrat was always performing. Focusing on aristocratic performance in a salon setting, my study combines and reconciles the conflicting images currently associated with this social and artistic milieu: a “mythical” image of expressive liberty and naturalness, on the one hand and on the other, a more sober image of constraint and underlying tension.

Thus the distinctions between private and public, confined and airy, urban and court spaces of the seventeenth century are not operative in my conceptualization of the salon. In my estimation, the salon was an elite form of social interaction entailing principally the art of conversation. The social performance of conversation set the stage for other performance practices to take place among interlocutors. Whether chatting, reciting, acting, or singing, they never strayed from the task of self-representation. In the seventeenth-century salon, social and artistic performance converged.

I have not been able to find a term in my corpus of primary sources that designates this multi-faceted form of social interaction. Like numerous historians of seventeenth-century French sociability, I will therefore use the term “salon.” In my study, however, the “salon” does not designate a concrete space or even the sole activity of conversation, but rather a social situation defined by the practice of conversation vis-à-vis a variety of vocal performance arts, namely voiced reading, poetic recitation, impersonation,

declamation, and song. By extension, the terms “salonnier” and “salonnière” will be used to designate aristocratic interlocutors engaged in these practices.<sup>67</sup> In a final note, I have endeavored to faithfully transcribe spelling, capitalization, and pneumatic punctuation in my primary-source citations, while applying current American syntactical punctuation and spacing to foreign citations, both primary and secondary.

IMAGE NOT AVAILABLE

**Figure I**  
Frontispiece  
Madeleine de Scudéry  
*Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets*, vol. 1  
(1684)

**Figure II**  
Frontispiece (detail)  
Pierre Ortigue de Vaumorière  
*L'art de plaire dans la conversation*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition  
(1701)

---

<sup>67</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* currently includes an entry for “salonnière,” defined as “a woman who holds a salon; a society hostess.” This definition corresponds roughly with my use of the term. The male version “salonnier,” however, is absent.



## 1. Pleasure in Performance

The seventeenth-century salon was synonymous with the formalized practice of conversation, and this practice called for a specific type of behavior. Its participants were expected to manifest aristocratic qualities, whether or not these persons belonged to the nobility. It was important to maintain an image of dignity, politeness, moderation, wit, and good judgment, in order to justify their inclusion in an exclusive salon circle. A vice that seventeenth-century theorists of salon sociability frequently condemned was that of affectation, an ambiguous term implying a certain unnaturalness. This unnaturalness was commonly termed “l’empressement,” or the excessive ambition to please, impress, or show off, leading to distortions, exaggerations, or other abuses in a given undertaking. Such ambition and effort were incompatible with the air of aristocratic assurance and ease defining salon sociability. Affectation constituted an aesthetic and social transgression in salon culture which idealized the union between beauty and simplicity. Salonnières were particularly sensitive to the vice of affectation and fancied that they could detect it in the slightest movement, facial expression, or enunciation of their interlocutor.<sup>1</sup>

In light of this vice, the undertaking of an artistic performance was not without its difficulties and risks for the salonnière. Though one was not expected to perform like a professional singer or actor, it was still important for the demonstration to be artistically

---

<sup>1</sup> Saint François de Sales, *Introduction à la vie dévote*, 201: “En toutes conversations, la naïveté [understood as naturalness], simplicité, douceur et modestie sont toujours préférées. Il y a des gens qui ne font nulle sorte de contenance ni de mouvement qu’avec tant d’artifice que chacun en est ennuyé; et comme celui qui ne voudrait jamais se promener qu’en comptant ses pas, ni parler qu’en chantant, serait fâcheux aux reste des hommes, ainsi ceux qui tiennent un maintien artificieux et qui ne font rien qu’à cadence, importunent extrêmement la conversation, et en cette sorte de gens il y a toujours quelque espèce de présomption.”

appealing and technically satisfactory. The best salon performances were thought to achieve these standards of quality without the appearance of affectation. How could one endeavor to perform well for the pleasure of others without showing one's effort to perform well? Salonnières found themselves in a delicate situation: they were expected to develop and demonstrate performance skills reflecting their aristocratic upbringing and capable of providing pleasure, and yet the very act of performance presented dangers for their aristocratic image. The present chapter thus focuses on the marked aversion for affectation in seventeenth-century salon culture and on the methods used to counter its manifestation in artistic performances by salonnières.

The key to avoiding the appearance of affectation, or the effort to perform well, was to appear indifferent to one's own performance. Accordingly, salonnières appeared to derive so much pleasure or instruction from the practice of their art that they appeared oblivious to their own audience and the very act of performance. The less concerned they seemed about the reception of their performance, the less affected their performance appeared, and the more enthusiastic the reception was. When salonnières undertook artistic performances for each other, their manifest purpose was not to impress their audience, but to indulge in a pleasurable activity and/or discover a work of art for themselves. Distinct from the sixteenth-century Italian concept of *la sprezzatura*, implying a certain disregard for the art one performs, seventeenth-century French salon culture forged its own performance protocol of non-affectation based on the spectacle of the performer's pleasure. Admittedly, whether or not salonnières really experienced the pleasure they manifested is a matter of speculation. However, whereas Norbert Elias argues that social constraints can be assimilated into psychological ones, I believe that it

was possible for pleasure in performance to be genuinely felt and not only simulated, or affected, in this polite social setting.

### ***Castiglione's Legacy in the Seventeenth-Century French Salon***

The aristocratic aversion for affectation in the act of performance is most famously expressed by Baldassare Castiglione in his treatise on sociability *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (1528), translated by Gabriel Chapuis in 1580 as *Le parfait courtisan*. Castiglione's theories extended humanism from the study and contemplation of ancient texts to a philosophy of life at court based on enlightened and engaging action. In seventeenth-century France, numerous theorists of sociability quoted, developed, and adapted his theories in their own works, whether or not they cited their source. Madeleine de Scudéry alludes to Castiglione's concept of the ideal courtier as "le modèle de la politesse."<sup>2</sup> The ideal courtier is a nobleman whose every word, gesture, and action is found "universally" pleasing, especially by the Prince whom he serves. This courtier who dabbles in dance, music, and sports uses performance as a means of gaining favor. Of course, the most consequential concept in Castiglione's work is *la sprezzatura*, or the courtier's feigning of artlessness in order to avoid the appearance of affectation. This concept was clearly related to *negligentia diligens* of the ancient arts of rhetoric and seduction (*ars est celare artem*), theorized notably by Cicero and Ovid. It was nonetheless innovative as an aesthetic and psychological principle underlying performing practices among the elite. In seventeenth-century France, the common adverbial expressions denoting artlessness and nonchalance, "cavalièrement" and "à la cavalière," seem to have paid tribute to Castiglione's courtier who was also an ideal

---

<sup>2</sup> Scudéry, "Les Jeux servant de preface à *Mathilde*," 28.

horseman.<sup>3</sup> Castiglione's courtier served as a reference for French salonniers seeking to avoid the appearance of affectation. It will therefore be useful to review in detail Castiglione's concept of *la sprezzatura*, in order to better appreciate how seventeenth-century French salon culture developed from it.

Castiglione's interrelated concepts of "la gratia," "la sprezzatura," and "l'affettazione" have been studied at length according to various theoretical and historical perspectives (e.g., the construction of an aristocratic identity based on humanist ideals, the normalization and politicization of elite culture in early modern Europe, the aesthetics of grace and negligence in the fine arts and literature). The present section serves to elucidate these concepts as they pertain to the performance practices of seventeenth-century French salonniers. The concepts are not elaborated by a single coherent and consistent discourse in Castiglione's work. The presentational format that the author chooses allows for a plurality of voices that contradict and correct each other as often as they corroborate each other. A small circle of aristocrats gathered around the duchess Elisabetta Gonzaga in her chamber engages in a polite conversation about exemplary aristocratic morals and behavior. The conversation does not produce any unequivocal rules, but rather what the literary historian Patrick Dandrey terms "suggestions."<sup>4</sup> Though Nicolas Faret, Jacques Du Bosc, Baltasar Gracián, and many other seventeenth-century writers incorporated, word for word, portions of Castiglione's text into their manuals prescribing proper social conduct, the literary historian Jennifer Richards

---

<sup>3</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 69: "paja, che non vi pensi, è stia a cavallo cosi disciolto, & sicuro, come si fosse a piedi."

<sup>4</sup> Dandrey, "Préface. La sagesse de l'élégance," c.

reminds us that Castiglione's work was not a "straight manual."<sup>5</sup> In Book I of *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, the Count Ludovico da Canossa flatly refuses to explain to Messer Cesare Gonzaga, how one can acquire "grace" in one's performances. This refusal implies that if *Il Libro del Cortegiano* constructs a portrait, or portraits, of the ideal courtier, it is not obliged to offer detailed instructions on how to become one (which would rob *Il Libro*, commensurate with *il Cortegiano*, of its own "grace"). Despite the equivocal and obliquely prescriptive nature of Castiglione's text, it is nonetheless possible to identify behavioral principles underlying aristocratic performance, principles that continued to evolve in seventeenth-century French salon culture.

It is important to first recognize that Castiglione's book belonged to a social, political, and aesthetic universe distinct from that of French salon culture. The context of aristocratic performance was radically different between them. Castiglione deems *la sprezzatura* necessary specifically for performances before many at Court. Messer Federico Fregoso, another interlocutor in the duchess's circle, distinguishes in Book II of *Il Libro del Cortegiano* between dancing "nel publico, & nel privato." The courtier must manifest the qualities of dignity, moderation, and a negligent lightness when he dances "in presentia di molti, & in loco pieno di popolo" in order to counter the impression of affectation. This lack of affectation distinguishes him from other courtiers and attracts the attention of the monarch. In a more intimate setting among several friends, "in camera privatamente, come hor noi ci troviamo," on the other hand, the courtier can let down his guard and dance as vigorously and as zealously as he so pleases.<sup>6</sup> The proto-

---

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Richards, "Assumed Simplicity and the Critique of Nobility: Or, How Castiglione Read Cicero." *Renaissance Quarterly*, 54:2 (Summer 2001): 460-486.

<sup>6</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtois*, 176.

salon of the duchess Gonzaga functions as a backstage to aristocratic performances undertaken at the court of Urbino. It is a “safe” place where the speakers can collectively, openly think about performance, where they can also perform for each other without worrying about appearing affected and being judged so.<sup>7</sup> However, in seventeenth-century France, the nature of “il privato” had evolved. When salonniers performed for each other, backstage became center stage; it was just as important to flee the appearance of affectation in a salon performance despite the intimacy and friendliness of this setting. Artistic performances by salonniers were always reflections of their personal merit and sense of dignity. These intimate performances were therefore approached as strategically and as carefully as public performances at court during the Italian Renaissance.

Other than Federico’s distinction between public and private performance, other important differences can be cited between Castiglione’s world and that of French salons. If Castiglione alludes to the practice of certain arts (i.e., dancing, singing, instrument-playing, impersonation, poetic recitation and impromptu), French salon culture often featured these and others (dramatic enactment, voiced reading). Moreover, the idea of conversation as an art, entailing protocols of politeness and patient audience<sup>8</sup> between

---

<sup>7</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 148: “Cosi confirmando ogniuno, impose là, Signora Duchessa a Madonna Margherita & Madonna Costanza Fregosa, che danzassero...”; 24: “L’Unico havendo taciuto alquanto, essendogli pur replicato che dicesse, in ultimo disse un Sonetto sopra la materia predetta...”

<sup>8</sup> In Book I of Castiglione’s text, much fuss is made when the character Cesare interrupts Canossa’s verbal portrait of the ideal courtier. The hostess chides Cesare for setting an example of incivility in front of the other members of her circle. Though the portrait and its interruption are made in the context of a game within the conversation, she reprimands her guest for breaking the rules not only of the game, but of her idea of polite conversation. See Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 58-60. Likewise, in his desire to correct the “impertinence” of his contemporaries, Montaigne insists not only on the importance of sound argumentation and judgment during the exercise of conversation, but also on the importance of being open, generous, and well-mannered in one’s manner of talking and listening. See Montaigne, “De l’art de conferer” in *Les Essais*, 924, 928: “Je festoye et caresse la verité en quelque main que je la trouve, et m’y

interlocutors, was only beginning to take form during the sixteenth century. By the seventeenth, the art of conversation was an established, codified practice. In view of these principal differences, it is not surprising that the quality of nonchalance in aristocratic performance had also evolved from what Castiglione had envisioned, as this chapter will demonstrate.

The characters in Castiglione's dialogue concur that aristocratic performance at court calls for a certain air about the performer, termed *la sprezzatura*. The quality of *la sprezzatura* is actually an affective performance that accompanies one's artistic performance. It guarantees the artistic performance from apparent affectation and instills it with some air of grace. The grace of the ideal courtier, according to Canossa in Book I, is an ineffable quality, an air which renders his actions, speech, and general appearance pleasant and likeable to those around him: "un sangue, che lo faccia al primo aspetto a chiunque lo vede, grato & amabile."<sup>9</sup> Those who demonstrate this quality have in common one tendency when they perform: "fuggir quanto più si puo, & come un asperissimo, & pericoloso scolino l'affettazione."<sup>10</sup> Grace is impossible when there is affectation. Canossa evokes the gentleman Pierpaulo whose exaggerated concentration and effort cause his body to tense up and become as rigid as a stick when he tries to dance, robbing his performance of the fluidity and flexibility necessary for any grace to

---

rends alaigrement, et luy tends mes armes vaincues [...] Tout homme peut dire veritablement; mais dire ordonnéement, prudemment et suffisamment, peu d'hommes le peuvent."

<sup>9</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 38.

<sup>10</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 65-66. This passage reappears in Faret, *L'Honneste homme*, 34-35: "Cependant pour rendre un peu plus claire une chose de si grande importance il me semble qu'on peut dire que comme cette grace dont nous parlons, s'estend universellement sur toutes les actions, & se mesle jusques dans les moindres discours; il y a de mesme une regle generale qui sert sinon à l'acquerir, du moins à ne s'en esloigner jamais. C'est de fuyr comme un precipice mortel cette malheureuse & importune Affectation, qui ternit & souille les plus belles choses; & d'user par tout d'une certaine negligence qui cache l'artifice, & tesmoigne que l'on ne fait rien que comme sans y penser, & sans aucune sorte de peine."

appear: “Quali di voi è, che non rida, quando il nostro M. Pier Paulo danza alla foggia sua, con quei saltetti, & gambe sticate in punta di piedi, senza mover la testa come se tutto fosse un legno, con tanta attentione, che di certo pare, che vada numerando i passi?”<sup>11</sup> This is not to say that the avoidance of affectation guarantees grace, but those who have grace are never guilty of affectation.

So, how does one avoid affectation in order to appear graceful? Canossa continues to explain: “per dir forse una nova parola, usar in ogni cosa una certa sprezzatura, che nasconda l’arte, e dimostri cio, che si fa, & dice, venir fatto senza fatica, & quasi senza pensarvi. Da questo credo io che derivi assai la gratia.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, *la sprezzatura* is a type of behavioral performance, a performed air of disregard for one’s artistic performance. One must act as if one cares little for the activity in which one is engaged, as if one is thinking about something else, in order to avoid the impression of affectation. The performer thus creates the illusion of a division between the body that performs and the mind that regards this performance with indifference. The behavioral performance of *la sprezzatura* suggests that the artistic performance has a life of its own, that it springs forth independently of the performer’s will. This autonomy recalls “questa eccellente gratia”: “quel benigno favor del cielo quasi al suo dispetto li guida piu alto che essi non desiderano, e fagli non solamente grati, ma admirabili a tutto il mondo.”<sup>13</sup> According to Canossa, *la sprezzatura* procures any aristocratic performer, if not “questa

---

<sup>11</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtesan*, 67.

<sup>12</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtesan*, 65-66.

<sup>13</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtesan*, 38, 61.



eccellente gratia” of the ideal courtier, then at least some semblance of it (“assai la gratia”).

Castiglione thus recommends that one appear to pay little heed to one’s own performances in order to avoid the impression of trying to impress. When one dances or plays an instrument, it is possible to demonstrate this indifference “con un parlar, o ridere, o addattarsi, monstrando non estimar, & pensar più ad ogn’altra cosa, che a quello.”<sup>14</sup> The division is clearly marked between the performance of the body and the indifference of the face and voice. Even though aristocratic performance associates itself more with *ingenium* than with *technè*, Castiglione wants it to appear almost mechanical and automatic in the performer’s body.<sup>15</sup> However, it is more difficult to speak or laugh offhandedly during a vocal performance without disrupting it or compromising its affective appeal. Still, one can conceal the effort required to sing well and seem to take this talent for granted: “voglio che dissimuli lo studio, & la fatica che è necessaria in tutte le cose, che si hanno a far bene: e mostri estimar poco in se stesso questa conditione.”<sup>16</sup> Thus the performer seems to abandon the performance to the audience, as if mentally absent from the activities of artistic production and reception. This affective distance from one’s own artistic performance is considered necessary in order to honor the aristocratic virtues of dignity and modesty, which the very act of performance can threaten. Without *la sprezzatura*, the performer seems to beg for approval by trying to show off.

---

<sup>14</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 67.

<sup>15</sup> See Jessica Wolfe, *Humanism, Machinery, and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 45-50.

<sup>16</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 180.

The behavioral performance of *la sprezzatura* thus entails a delicate, paradoxical balance. On the one hand, Canossa in Book I maintains that the performer must not show “strain” from the effort to perform: “lo sforzare (& come si dice) tirar per i capegli, dà somma disgratia, & fa estimar poco ogni cosa, per grande, che ella si sia.”<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, as Federico suggests in Book II, the performer must show a certain “strain” implying that the performance is independent of the performer’s will and ambition: “Venga adunque il Cortegiano a far musica, come a cosa per passar tempo, & quasi sforzato.”<sup>18</sup> If the performer’s mind thus appears to care little for the body’s performance, should this lack of care be reflected in the quality of the performance? Can “true art hide itself” (“quella esser vera arte, che non appare esser arte”<sup>19</sup>) through the apparent nonchalance of the performer, if the performance itself strives for excellence and perfection?

These questions do not find a clear response in Castiglione’s work. When Canossa says “fa estimar poco ogni cosa, per grande ch’ella si sia,” he seems to associate *la sprezzatura* and artistic excellence. He adds that the spectacle of nonchalance would make the audience believe the performer virtually incapable of even making a mistake: “per far credere a chi vede quasi di non saper, ne poter errare.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Federico insists that if the ideal courtier nonchalantly undertakes a musical performance, he must still do so “col farla eccellentemente, la faccia estimar assai dagli altri.”<sup>21</sup> On the other

---

<sup>17</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 66.

<sup>18</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 179.

<sup>19</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 66.

<sup>20</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 67.

<sup>21</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 180.

hand, with reference to dance, Federico insists that the aristocratic performer's excellence should not evoke that of the professional artist: "benchè si senta leggierrissimo, & che abbia tempo, & misura assai, non entri in quelle prestezze de piedi, & duplicati rebattimenti, i quali veggiamo che nel nostro Barletta stanno benissimo, & forse a un Gentiluomo sariano poco convenienti."<sup>22</sup> If ostentatious virtuosity characterizes the professional, it does not become the aristocratic performer. Canossa claims that the aristocrat's performance is more suggestive than demonstrative of excellence: "nel danzare un passo solo, un sol movimento della persona gratioso, & non sforzato [...] nel cantar [...] une sola voce terminata con soave accento in un groppetto duplicato con tal facilità [...] con quel punto solo fa conoscere, che sa molto più di quello, che fa."<sup>23</sup> In other passages of Castiglione's work, however, the quality of aristocratic performance is characterized not by excellence, but by graceful, intentional imperfections. In Book I, when the Magnifico Giulian de' Medici evokes a musical analogy to illustrate *la sprezzatura*, he refers to the use of dissonance in order to render consonance more pleasing:

è vizio grandissimo, far due consonantie perfette, l'una dopo l'altra, tal che il medesimo sentimento dell'audito nostro l'abborrisce, & spesso ama una seconda, o settima, che in se è dissonantia aspera, & intollerabile [...] dimostra una troppo affettata armonia [...] donde piu l'orecchie nostre stanno suspese, e piu avidamente attendono, & gustano le perfette, e dilettaansi talhor di quella dissonantia della seconda, o settima, come di cosa sprezzata.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 176. See Méré, "Discours VI: Suite du Commerce du Monde," 3:163: "il me semble qu'il seroit à souhaiter d'exceller en tous les talens, qui réussissent dans le monde: Les exercices ne sont pas à mépriser, et principalement la Danse [...] Neanmoins je ne serois pas d'avis qu'il y parut de l'affectation, et j'ai vû des gens de qualité, qu'on prenoit pour des Baladins, parce qu'ils s'étoient trop piquez de bien danser."

<sup>23</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 72. See Méré, "Discours des Agrémens," 2:34: "Cette manière qui semble negligée fait excuser ceux qui n'ont pas atteint la perfection: et quand on excelle, elle donne à penser qu'on pourroit aller plus loin; c'est une tromperie obligeante qui ne tend qu'à rendre la vie heureuse."

<sup>24</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 70.

In order to avoid an “affected harmony” sounding too “perfect,” consonance must occasionally give way to dissonance. The contrast between consonance and dissonance in this passage does not seem analogous to the relationship between an excellent performance and an indifferent attitude. Magnifico suggests that “perfection” in performance should occasionally give way to imperfection, the way “perfect” consonance must give way to dissonance in music. Likewise, Federico insists that any performance should combine “diligentia, ed attillatura circa la principal intentione della cosa, in che mostrar si vuole,” on the one hand, “& una certa sprezzatura circa quello, che non importa,”<sup>25</sup> on the other. Federico implies here that *la sprezzatura* should be employed on a selective basis, resulting in occasional, minor imperfections. Still, Canossa warns that one must not exaggerate such imperfections in order to demonstrate one’s nonchalance, which only leads to sloppiness in performance and affectation in *la sprezzatura* itself:

Messer Bernardo Bibiena disse [...] M. Roberto nel danzare non ha pari al mondo: che per mostrar ben di non pensarvi, si lascia cader la robba spesso dalle spalle, & le pantoffole da piedi, & senza raccorre nell’uno & l’altro tuttavia danza. Rispose allhora il Conte: [...] chiaramente si conosce, che esso si sforza con ogni studio mostrar di non pensarvi, & questo è il pensarvi troppo. E perchè passa certi termini di mediocrità, quella sprezzatura è affettata, e sta male, & è una cosa, che a punto riesce al contrario del suo presupposito, cioè di nasconder l’arte.<sup>26</sup>

If *la sprezzatura* in the performer’s attitude is used to hide affectation in performance, an intentionally imperfect performance can backfire and reveal the affectation behind the performer’s unaffected façade. The Castiglionian specialist Eduardo Saccone has contended that the aristocratic performance protocol of *la sprezzatura* was so generalized during the early modern period that it was impossible to demonstrate this quality without

---

<sup>25</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 177.

<sup>26</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 68.

others suspecting that it was just an act.<sup>27</sup> I do not share his skepticism. The counterexample of Messer Roberto implies that *la sprezzatura*, if judiciously performed, guarantees an element of mystery in one's artistic performance. It makes the audience wonder if the performer is not only pretending to be nonchalant, if performance, whether excellent or excellently imperfect, has really become second nature.

The ambiguities and complexities in Castiglione's discussion of *la sprezzatura* led to diverse attitudes and practices in seventeenth-century French salon culture. French salonniers continued to revere the social quality of grace rendering a person both admirable and likeable, a quality re-baptized *l'honnêteté*.<sup>28</sup> When salonniers performed for each other, they may have done so with slight imperfections, which was thought to distinguish the nonchalant aristocratic performer from the zealous professional performer. Du Bosc, author of the treatise on polite sociability for women *L'Honneste femme*, maintains, "Ce n'est pas mon intention de persuader pour cela qu'on doive estudier des fautes, mais pourveu qu'elles soient legeres on les pourroit commettre quelquefois si heureusement."<sup>29</sup> Similarly, in Scudéry's fictional representations of salon gatherings, one often finds sentences such as "Noromate chanta deux airs passionnez presque aussi bien qu'on peut chanter."<sup>30</sup> The adverb "presque" is employed less in a spirit of literary

---

<sup>27</sup> Eduardo Saccone, "Grazia, Sprezzatura, Affettazione in the Courtier," in *Castiglione / The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture* ed. Robert W. Hanning, David Rosand (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1983), 62: "For this restricted public of the competent, sprezzatura consists, beyond doubt, of a performance, like a conjuring act, which they attend, knowing full well that there is some trick [...] the group in the know are well aware that they must not take the words literally," that they are "artificial constructions."

<sup>28</sup> According to Don Fader, "*Honnêteté* is a transliteration of Cicero's 'honestum,' a term that combines virtue with the propriety (*decorum*) required of an aristocratic speaker in a senate or other governing body." See Fader, "The *Honnête homme* as Music Critic," 8.

<sup>29</sup> Du Bosc, *L'Honneste femme*, 147.

<sup>30</sup> Scudéry, "Les Jeux servant de preface à *Mathilde*," 12.

realism (i.e., an amateur salonnier cannot sing “aussi bien qu’on peut chanter”) and more in reference to an aristocratic ideal (i.e., the salonnier does not *want* to sing so well). In his “Discours des Agrémens,” Antoine Gombault, chevalier de Méré has difficulty deciding whether or not salonniers should excel in their artistic performances. He remarks that imperfections prevent the performer from inciting jealousy, which would undermine friendly sociability: “Car pour estre bien dans le monde, il n’est d’avoir rien d’exquis: cela mesme pourroit nuire en plusieurs rencontres, parce que lors qu’on excelle, il arrive toûjours qu’on efface beaucoup de gens, et qu’ensuite on s’attire l’envie: mais la médiocrité ne choque personne.”<sup>31</sup> Upon further thought, however, Méré fears that imperfections reflect badly on the performer: “cependant après y avoir bien pensé, je trouve qu’on ne sçauroit trop plaire, et qu’il faut exceller si l’on peut dans les choses qu’on entreprend, ou ne s’en pas mesler.”<sup>32</sup> He thus concurs with Castiglione’s character Canossa: it is possible to appear nonchalant in the midst of an excellent performance. Méré finally decides that “c’est l’empressement qui déplaist [...] il faut exceller si l’on peut en tout ce qui se presente, et considerer de temps en temps l’idée de la perfection.”<sup>33</sup> Thus nonchalance, as opposed to “l’empressement,” continued to define aristocratic performance in salon culture, with a cautious approach to excellence. In Scudéry’s novel *La Clélie*, the description of the salonnière Clarinte (representing Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, Madame de Sévigné, the famous epistolary writer) suggests that a performer’s

---

<sup>31</sup> Méré, “Discours des Agrémens,” 2:32-33. See also Gracián, *L’Homme de cour*, 88: “L’Envie a son Ostracisme, & cet Ostracisme est d’autant plus à la mode, qu’il est injuste [...] Il est donc à propos de s’endormir quelquefois, comme le bonhomme Homère, & d’affecter de certains manquemens, soit dans l’esprit, ou dans le courage [...] pour apaiser la Malveillance.”

<sup>32</sup> Méré, “Discours des Agrémens,” 2:33.

<sup>33</sup> Méré, “Discours des Agrémens,” 2:34, 36.

pursuit of excellence was not necessarily incommensurate with an aristocratic air: “une voix douce, juste et charmante [...] quoy qu’elle chante d’une manière passionnée et qu’on peut effectivement dire qu’elle chante fort bien, elle chante pourtant en personne de condition, c’est-à-dire sans y mettre son honneur, sans s’en faire prier & sans façon [...]”<sup>34</sup> If Clarinte does not appear to accord much importance to her beautiful vocal performance, she would be just as content to keep quiet. When invited to sing, she does so without hesitation or fussing, as if singing were as natural to her as talking. This carefree attitude only heightens her interlocutors’ admiration for her. Clarinte is the quintessential aristocratic performer of the seventeenth-century French salon; like Castiglione’s ideal, she performs naturally well and takes it for granted.

Whereas Castiglione associates the professional artist with virtuosity (see the reference to Barletta above), Scudéry is not alone in associating the professional artist with affectation. Adapting a passage from Quintilian’s *Institutes of Oratory*,<sup>35</sup> Michel Le Faucheur compares the stage actor unfavorably to the orator in his *Traité de l’Action de l’Orateur*:

Outre que le Geste des Prédicateurs doit être conforme au sujet, il faut de plus qu’il soit fort naturel & fort modeste, & très propre pour exciter les mouvements de la dévotion, & de la piété &, comme nous l’avons dit de la Voix, il n’y a point de lieu que la Chaire où le geste doit être *plus naïf & moins affecté*, c’est pourquoi ils doivent éviter<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Scudéry, *La Clélie, histoire romaine*. 3<sup>ème</sup> partie (Paris: Augustin Courbé, 1657), 1330. See Melanire’s contrasting affectation in de Pure, *La préieuse*, 1:92-93: “Il se fit aussitost un grand concours de prieres [...] toute l’assemblée [...] obligea Melanire, qui faisoit plus de semblant de s’en vouloir excuser qu’elle n’en avoit d’envie, de suppléer Philonime de l’excuser, si elle osoit en sa présence debiter un ouvrage de femme [...] Melanire, outre qu’elle n’avoit pas grand besoin d’estre sollicitée pour dire sa pièce, ne perdit point de temps [...] se mit en posture de haranguer.”

<sup>35</sup> Book XI, art. 181: “non enim comoedum esse, sed oratorem volo. Quare neque in gestu persequemur omnis argutias nec in loquendo distinctionibus temporibus adfectionibus moleste utemur.”

<sup>36</sup> In *Sept traités sur le jeu du comédien*, 181. Emphasis mine.

The complaint against the affectation of stage actors appears to have been a commonplace. At the end of the seventeenth century, Madame Catherine Travers du Pérou, headmistress at L'École de Saint-Cyr condemns secular theater for its affectation, which she distinguishes from her students' stage productions at this pious institution: "Tout le monde convint que l'opéra et la Comédie n'aprochoient pas de ce spectacle. On voyoit ici sur le Théâtre de jeunes Dllles bien faites dont les Rôles rendus avec modestie n'inspiroient que piété et vertu, et qui éloignées des affectations du Théâtre profane donoient aux spectateurs l'idée de la plus pure innocence."<sup>37</sup> The association between stage performance and affectation was by no means specific to the religious censure of theater. The musical theorist and composer Bénigne de Bacilly, author of *Remarques curieuses sur l'art de bien chanter*,<sup>38</sup> associates the art of singing on the stage with the expression "outrer le chant" and with "cette grande affectation qui souvent est

---

<sup>37</sup> du Pérou, Rés. F. 629-630: 1:95.

<sup>38</sup> The second edition of this work was re-baptized *Traité de la méthode ou L'Art de bien chanter* (Paris: G. de Luyne, 1671). There are no textual differences between these two editions. In 1679, Bacilly released an enhanced third edition entitled *L'Art de bien chanter de M. de Bacilly. Augmenté d'un Discours qui sert de Réponse à la Critique de ce Traité, et d'une plus ample instruction pour ceux qui aspirent à la perfection de cet Art. Ouvrage tres-utile, non seulement pour le Chant, mais même pour la Declamation*. Catherine Massip does not judge Bacilly to be the most reliable expert on the art of singing: "Son importance est actuellement surévaluée dans la mesure où son traité sert de guide aux interprètes du chant français: gageons qu'aux yeux de ses contemporains, il occupait une place moins éminent." She faults his treatise for presenting a series of vocalises that "gaspille son ornamentation sans discrimination et d'une façon uniforme." With regard to the poetics of song-writing, Massip states, "Bien que Bacilly soit lui-même poète et écrive de nombreux textes qu'il mettra en musique, son goût littéraire semble moins sûr et moins rigoureux que celui de [Michel] Lambert." See Massip, *L'art de bien chanter*, 252, 272, 275. However, Bacilly seems to have been respected by his contemporaries as a musical authority. He was the musical editor for several years of *Le Mercure galant*, in which it is written of him and his treatise: "Vous sçavez, Madame, que peu de Personnes [...] ont une connoissance aussi parfaite [de la 'belle manière de chanter'] que Mr de Bacilly, & qu'il en a mesme fait un Traité fort utile à ceux qui veulent parler en public, à cause des Regles de prononciation, & de quantité de choses tres-curieusement remarquées." See Donneau de Visé, *Le Mercure galant*, 1678/12, 104-105. See also Le Cerf de la Viéville, *Comparaison de la Musique italienne et de la musique françoise*, 130: one of the salonniers evokes the "agrément" of singing "du regne de Lambert & de Bacilly."



accompagnée de grimace.”<sup>39</sup> The musicologist Don Fader thus makes the following observation regarding salon singing: “*mondain* culture encouraged a *politesse du chant* that integrated musical talent with other social graces and cultivated a restraint of expression that eschewed the overly theatrical and affected.”<sup>40</sup> When salonnières sought to avoid affectation in their artistic performances, they were simultaneously endeavoring to avoid an unflattering association with professional stage artists.

If apparent or actual nonchalance was the salonnier’s objective, this quality was not necessarily synonymous with that of indifference recommended by Castiglione. Still, recent studies of seventeenth-century French salon culture seem to leave Castiglione the first and last word on nonchalance and the avoidance of affectation in aristocratic performance. One such work is the most exhaustive analysis of salonnier singing to date, *Poésie, musique et sociabilité au XVIIe siècle: les “Livres d’airs de différents auteurs” publiés chez Ballard de 1658 à 1694* by Anne-Madeleine Goulet. Goulet’s study revolves around a vast corpus of *airs sérieux* published in numerous anthologies between 1658 and 1694 by the French music editor Ballard.<sup>41</sup> These musical anthologies consist

---

<sup>39</sup> Bacilly, “Discours qui sert de réponse à la Critique de l’Art de chanter,” 11.

<sup>40</sup> Fader, “The *Honnête homme* as Music Critic,” 30.

<sup>41</sup> The art of singing in seventeenth-century France was generally associated with elite performance practices in both court and domestic settings. Aristocratic and upper bourgeois amateurs performed monophonic *airs de cour*, commonly known as *airs sérieux* by the 1650’s, as well as the jollier *chansons à danser* and *airs à boire*. First performed by professional musicians hired to entertain the monarch and his entourage at Court, numerous *airs de cour* for solo voice with lute or theorbo accompaniment (notated in tablature, then figured bass) were published throughout the first half of the seventeenth century. They were thereby made available for practice among elite amateurs. The virtuosic ornamentation introduced into performances before the king was not necessarily attempted by these amateurs, who were free to vocally ornament the same melody according to their own skills and taste, and with varying adherence to the examples provided in treatises like Marin Mersenne’s *Harmonie universelle* and Jean Millet’s *La Belle méthode ou l’Art de bien chanter*. Certain musicologists, particularly Goulet, distinguish musically and poetically between the *air de cour* and the *air sérieux*, while others, including Massip, refer to all seventeenth-century sentimental airs for solo voice and figured bass as *airs de cour* or simply “airs.”

mostly of melodies for solo voice with figured bass. They were intended for salonniers who performed them with or without instrumental accompaniment (e.g., theorbo, lute, guitar, harpsichord) by the singer or another. Ballard's songbooks were generally small in size, thus easy to handle or to stuff in one's pocket. In the course of conversation, an interlocutor could spontaneously produce one of these small scores and begin singing. Goulet focuses on the social performativity of songs performed in a salon setting, rather than on the performers' artistry. She interprets the Castiglionian principle of *la sprezzatura* to mean that salonniers were somewhat indifferent to artistic quality when they performed for each other. She shows that a spontaneous singing performance could amplify one's argument, be used to support or refute that of one's interlocutor, incite commentary, particularly when there was a lull in the dialogue, redirect conversation if the group harmony was threatened, or contain a hidden message announced before all yet intended for the person who knew how to correctly interpret it.<sup>42</sup> Goulet recognizes that such vocal performances were a source of pleasure and divertissement. They served to reveal one's familiarity with the fashionable poetry and music of the day, not to mention the beauty of one's voice. Still, as Goulet maintains, this performance was expected to be relevant to the current topic of conversation and amenable to one's interlocutors. It was offered as a gift to them and intended to strengthen interpersonal bonds. Goulet distinguishes between the salonnier's performance, a social gesture under the guise of art, from a "numéro de virtuose" or a "prestation [qui] confine au spectacle."<sup>43</sup> Goulet insists

---

<sup>42</sup> Massip, *L'Art de bien chanter*, 110: "l'air n'est pas seulement un genre musical; il apparaît également comme un fait de société et un instrument fort utilisé dans la stratégie amoureuse qui occupe une partie de l'activité intellectuelle de ces salons."

<sup>43</sup> Goulet, *Poésie, musique et sociabilité au XVIIIe siècle*, 698.

on the social functionality of the *air sérieux* in the context of conversation in order to prove that it was not simply a form of entertainment, but a “vecteur de communication.” Her study illuminates the long neglected musical genre of the *air sérieux* as well as dispelling the myth of “art for art’s sake” with regard to salon entertainment.

Goulet thus seems to accord less importance to the artistry of vocal performances by salonniers in order to emphasize their social utility. Goulet’s study seems to elucidate Castiglione’s concept by providing an answer to the question: if the aristocratic performer does not seem to think about the performance at hand,<sup>44</sup> then what is the performer thinking about? Goulet’s proposed answer: the performer is thinking about the other members of the circle, not primarily as an audience to impress, but as interlocutors with whom the performer continues to converse through song. Goulet’s anthropological perspective thus reveals how an aristocratic air of detachment was not simply a sign of arrogance and could actually serve salon conviviality.

Castiglione’s model courtier may have influenced aristocratic codes of conduct in Europe for centuries to come, but not all of his traits were systematically adopted by salonniers. They may have emulated the nonchalance of the courtier in performance, but their nonchalance did not necessarily have the same quality of indifference recommended by Castiglione. On the contrary, my sources suggest that it was more often through the spectacle of the performer’s intense pleasure in art, and not a disregard for it, that the quality of nonchalance vis-à-vis the act of performance was demonstrated. Whereas

---

<sup>44</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 65: “usar in ogni cosa una certa sprezzatura, che nasconda l’arte, e dimostri, ciò che si fa, e dice, venir fatto senza fatica, e quasi senza pensarvi”; 67: “monstrando non estimar, e pensar più ad org’altra cosa, che a quello”; 69: “che paja che non vi pensi.”

Castiglione's courtier appeared absent from his artistic endeavor, salonniers appeared entirely present and absorbed in theirs.

### ***Performing for One's Pleasure***

According to Castiglione, the ideal courtier engages in artistic performances in order to provide his audience with pleasure. However, as is argued in Book IV, pleasure must serve an ethical purpose. Pleasure in art is situated at one end of a long causal chain resulting in the greater good of society. The ideal courtier must use his performances to distinguish himself from other courtiers, particularly in the eyes of the prince whom he serves. By means of pleasure, he gains the favor, allegiance, and trust of the prince. The prince then promotes him to the status of royal advisor, enabling the former courtier to guide the prince and his people on the path of virtue and glory. For Scudéry, while the practice of conversation itself is pleasurable, it can also serve the purposes of moral inquiry and intellectual enlightenment, demonstrated in all of her *Conversations* published in the 1680's and not just in her later *Conversations morales*. The fact that Castiglione and Scudéry present philosophical concepts, moral reflections, historical accounts, and literary analyses in the form of a delightful conversation among non-erudite aristocrats reveals that nothing could be taken seriously by a salonnier readership unless it brought pleasure.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> See Fader, "The *Honnête homme* as Music Critic," 19: "Writings that were designed to educate *mondain* readers often framed their discussions as carefully crafted *galant* conversations which, although they mention books and authors, never depart from the polite language of *honnêteté* to indulge in learned discourse of technical details [...] Likewise, more academically oriented writers who wrote on newly popular intellectual topics frequently produced vulgarizations that rendered their subjects *galant* and amusing in order to please readers."

Indeed, it was virtually impossible to produce a text pertaining to salon sociability without reference, and many times deference, to the pursuit of pleasure.<sup>46</sup> The individual and collective pursuit of pleasure was not only a way of life, but a philosophy of life. Pleasure was a commodity used to buy favor, privileges, power and acceptance. It was the very foundation of salon sociability. Not only did one give pleasure to the people in one's company, civility required one to show them that their company was just as pleasurable. In other words, the spectacle of one's enjoyment was indispensable to the real enjoyment of one's interlocutors and the harmony of the circle. Artistic performances in a salon setting were, of course, valued sources of pleasure, both aesthetic and social. Moreover, a salon audience's pleasure was inspired to a large extent by the manifestation of the performer's pleasure. Affectation was abhorred because it implied a certain anxiousness in the performer's desire to please. Rather than performed indifference, the pleasure of the performer served to ward off the unpleasantness of affectation, and this pleasure was not only pretense.

In seventeenth-century French salon culture, the art of singing went hand in hand with the art of sociability, as Goulet has established, but this association was only possible when the singer and listeners manifested and shared their pleasure in music. Bacilly claims that singers should not focus solely on their musical "talent," but join this talent with a polite literary culture ("quelques études des lettres, un peu de connoissance pour la Poësie et pour la declamation [...] et dans le Langage"), as well as the manners

---

<sup>46</sup> The subtitle of Nicolas Faret's treatise "*L'art de plaire à la cour*" is revelatory. For further analysis, see André Lévêque, "'L'honnête homme' et 'l'homme de bien' au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle." *PMLA*, 72:4 (Sept. 1957): 620-632.

associated with the practice of conversation.<sup>47</sup> The ensemble of these qualities distinguishes the polite “Chanteur” worthy of society’s admiration from the “Menestrier,” a mere technician and lowly entertainer: “Il est donc vray de dire que le Chant est quelque chose de plus considerable que l’on ne s’imagine.”<sup>48</sup> Though song can thus be used to reflect the culture and refinement of the performer, Bacilly insists that its primary purpose is to give the singer pleasure. To illustrate his point, he relates an anecdote about two salon amateurs, “illustres Dames qui chantent dans la dernière perfection”:

[...] une qui pardessus l’autre, la faculté d’exécuter certains Airs badins, sans Paroles, qui consistent purement dans une délicatesse de gosier à laquelle l’autre demeure d’accord qu’elle ne pourroit jamais parvenir; & cependant quand il est question d’exécuter le recitatif et animer le Chant, elle s’en acquitte aussi bien que celle qui est bornée a cette façon de chanter ampoulée, pour montrer que c’est le plus que de mignarder le Chant quand on le peut, & non pas le moins, & qu’il est bien plus aisé à celui qui chante délicatement d’animer quand bon luy semble qu’il n’est aisé à celui qui marque beaucoup le Chant de rendre son gosier flexible à mille délicatesses [...] l’autre [manière] sied mieux dans la bouche d’un Maistre Chantre, qui a pour but de regaler une assemblée d’Auditeurs que dans celle d’une Dame qui ne chante que pour son divertissement.<sup>49</sup>

The expressions “une délicatesse de gosier,” “mignarder le Chant,” “celuy qui chante délicatement,” and “rendre son gosier flexible à mille délicatesses” are associated with the first singer and opposed to “cette façon de chanter ampoulée,” “animer le Chant,” and a manner “qui marque beaucoup le Chant,” associated with the second. Both types of singing are recognized as excellent, but they differ with respect to volume and agility. In order to reveal the delicateness and flexibility of the salon singer’s throat,<sup>50</sup> light and

---

<sup>47</sup> Bacilly, “Discours qui sert de réponse à la Critique de l’Art de chanter,” 5.

<sup>48</sup> Bacilly, “Discours qui sert de réponse à la Critique de l’Art de chanter,” 7.

<sup>49</sup> Bacilly, “Discours qui sert de réponse à la Critique de l’Art de chanter,” 12-13.

<sup>50</sup> Mersenne, *Harmonie Universelle*, 40: “C’est chose assurée que l’anche du larynx, c’est-à-dire sa languette, ou son ouverture, contribuë plus immédiatement aux passages & aux fredons que les autres parties [...] ceux qui ont ladite languette plus mobile, sont plus propres pour faire les passages et les fredons.”

“cute” ornaments are preferred over loud and virtuosic ones.<sup>51</sup> Bacilly seems to blame the lady with the louder voice for straying from her social character and resembling the professional singer performing for a large audience. The lady with the smaller, more delicate voice, on the contrary, is said to only sing “pour son divertissement.”

Admittedly, the intimacy of the salon setting required singers to lower their volume and introduce subtle nuances in ornamentation in consideration for the proximity of their listeners. Though she performs in front of others, however, Bacilly’s first lady does not perform for them, soliciting their admiration. She sings quietly and delicately because she is singing primarily to herself. The more she seems to forget her audience and take pleasure in her song, the farther away she is from the “precipice mortel” of affectation, and the more pleasure the audience derives from her performance. If Castiglione recommends that performers appear absent from their performance, Bacilly recommends that performers pretend that the audience is absent, as if they were casually practicing by and for themselves, alone with their art.

Fader insists that salon sociability was based on the art of pleasing others at the expense of one’s own pleasure, that the pursuit of pleasure in performance was synonymous with affectation.<sup>52</sup> However, I believe that the amateur performer’s pleasure and the listeners’ pleasure were codependent and contagious in a salon setting. By pretending to sing in front of nobody but oneself, the salonnier was not excluding and

---

<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the character Eulalie refers to such ornaments as the “mignardises d’un air.” See de Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 2:182.

<sup>52</sup> Fader, “The *Honnête homme* as Music Critic,” 20: “Liking music too much can blind the music lover to its true function – pleasing others – and can lead him into the sin of pride and the temptation to show off”; 21: “Like the orator, a courtier’s first consideration is what will please his audience”; 22: “Like Castiglione’s courtier and unlike a professional singer, the princess sings ‘as a noble person’ not because she seeks the applause of others but rather because she seeks to please them”; 30: “*mondain* writers continued to insist on *honnête* musical self-effacement.”

offending those listening. On the contrary, the performer invited the audience into the intimacy of a private, personal pleasure. A performance was offered to one's interlocutors in the spirit of "charity," understood as the generosity that moves one to treat others as oneself. The alterity separating the performer and audience was effaced and replaced by a bond of trust. According to salon etiquette, interlocutors approached each other as "friends,"<sup>53</sup> and among friends, the pleasure of one was necessarily the pleasure of everyone. Through ties of friendship, the audience's presence and enjoyment in art became extensions of the performer's. Thus Charles Sorel's "Preface du Musicien" to "La Dispute du Luth et de la Guytare," a short dialogue intended for enactment among salonniers, opens with the following lines: "Bien que je ne sois pas fort Sçavant en musique, si est-ce que j'en sçay assez pour me divertir moy mesme, & quelque autre personne qui me portant de l'affection auroit agreable tout ce qui viendrait de moi."<sup>54</sup> In Sorel's sentence, the pleasure of the musician practicing for himself precedes and seems to supersede his performance before another. One can only deliver an "agreeable" performance when one has the freedom to enjoy one's art as if one were alone, instead of allowing the presence of "quelque autre personne" to transform this pleasure into a mission to impress.<sup>55</sup> Therein lies a meaningful gesture of friendship extended to the

---

<sup>53</sup> Scudéry, "Les Jeux servant de peface à *Mathilde*," 10: In the course of a salon conversation, Philiste remarks, "je ne laisse pas de croire qu'il y a de l'estime, & d'une certain amitié d'habitude & de bienséance qui rend la société agreable."

<sup>54</sup> Sorel, *Nouveau recueil*, 170.

<sup>55</sup> Similarly, the practice of writing poetry was justified among salonniers as a means of amusing oneself and, consequently, of pleasing one's readers and/or listeners. See de Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 1:2: Before attending a salon together, Philonime offers to show his poem to Agathonte, saying, "De grace considerez que je ne fais pas profession d'estre Poëte. Cette chanson n'est qu'une épreuve & un essay de ma veine: ie ne pretens point par là au prix, ny mesme à l'estime des grans Hommes [...] Mon dessein n'est que de m'amuser & de vous plaire."



members of one's salon audience: entrusting them with the spectacle of one's private pleasure.

If an intense personal pleasure in art was thus emphasized as the motivation behind performance, this pleasure could run the risk of falling into abuse. Sorel's Musician continues to explain that he practices his lute and guitar so often and with such zeal that his instruments have come alive and can talk: "Aussi pour suppleer à mes deffauts, j'ay tousjours eu plus de soin que les autres, & j'ay tant fait que j'ay eu des instrumens qui parlent, soit qu'ils ayent esté enchantez par une Fée, ou que les Dieux leur ayent accordé cette propriété."<sup>56</sup> A humorous incongruity thus surfaces between the Musician's casual, aristocratic pleasure in art ("Bien que je ne sois pas fort Sçavant en musique, si est-ce que j'en sçay assez pour me divertir moy mesme") and a less aristocratic concern for his mistakes corrected through lengthy practice. Perhaps this incongruity is responsible for the bizarre phenomenon of his instruments coming to life. On the same subject of over-practicing one's lute, Valentin Conrart, premier secrétaire of the Académie Française and a good friend of Madeleine de Scudéry, reports in his *Mémoires* that she gave up the lute because she found that the pleasure of learning that instrument was taking too much of her time: "elle eut envie de savoir jouer du luth, et elle en prit quelques leçons avec assez de succès; mais comme c'est un exercice où il faut donner un grand temps, quoique ce ne soit qu'un pur divertissement et un amusement agréable, elle ne put se résoudre à être si prodigue du sien, qu'elle tenoit mieux employé aux occupations de l'esprit."<sup>57</sup> One must not give too much time and energy to what is

---

<sup>56</sup> Sorel, *Nouveau recueil*, 170-171.

<sup>57</sup> Conrart, *Collection des Mémoires relatifs à l'Histoire de France*. 48, *Mémoires de Valentin Conrart* (Paris, Foucault, 1825), 255.

supposed to only be an “amusement agréable.” According to Saint François de Sales, if one devotes too much time to a pleasurable activity such as dancing, “ce n’est plus récréation, c’est occupation,” which is no longer pleasurable. He also maintains that an exaggerated “affection” for this activity constitutes a type of affectation, or “empressement,” which must be avoided.<sup>58</sup> Similar to François de Sales, Scudéry maintains in “Les Jeux servant de preface à *Mathilde*” that pleasure is only possible when it is fleeting: “les longs plaisirs cessent de l’être [...] nul homme n’a jamais eu un plaisir unique [...] le changement, la variété & la nouveauté en font la principale partie [...] il faut les prendre selon que le hazard les offre, & selon qu’ils se rapportent à nostre humeur.”<sup>59</sup> Thus the pleasure that salonniers manifested during their performances was not supposed to reflect an obsession (an affected affection) for their art. In the manifestation of pleasure, the salonnier tried to perform before others as if practicing alone. At the same time, it was important to show that both practice and performance were fruits of “le hazard” and not “occupations.”

Thus the Musician in “La Dispute du Luth et de la Guytare” is too zealous to exemplify the salonnier. On the other hand, *La Maison des Jeux* by Sorel, which undoubtedly served as the model for “Les Jeux” by Scudéry, represents a salon gathering in which a collective dramatic performance elegantly synthesizes and reconciles *la sprezzatura* and pleasure in performance. This performance implies an immersion in art

---

<sup>58</sup> Saint François de Sales, *Introduction à la vie dévote*, 220-225: “Prendre l’air, se promener, s’entretenir de devis joyeux et amiables, sonner du luth ou autre instrument, chanter un musique, aller à la chasse, ce sont récréations si honnêtes que pour en bien user il n’est besoin que de la commune prudence, qui donne à toutes choses le rang, le temps, le lieu et la mesure [...] Je ne dis pas qu’il ne faille prendre plaisir à jouer pendant que l’on joue, car autrement on ne se récréerait pas; mais je dis qu’il ne faut pas y mettre son affection pour le désirer, pour s’y amuser et s’en empresser [...] pour honnête que soit une récréation, c’est vice d’y mettre son cœur et son affection.”

<sup>59</sup> Scudéry, “Les Jeux servant de preface à *Mathilde*,” 16, 17.

and an ironic distance from it, in a pleasure of the moment that strengthens the ties of friendship thereafter:

[...] apres le repas, comme l'on vint à parler de Comedies, il se trouva que deux ou trois jeunes-hommes & autant de filles sçavoient par cœur la pluspart des vers d'une Tragicomédie qu'un de la compagnie avoit faite, laquelle n'avoit jamais esté prophanée devant le peuple. Ils prirent donc chacun leur personnage avec une liberté telle que l'on la devoit avoir entre personnes de connoissance, & sans autre preparation se mirent à représenter cette piece d'une façon la plus divertissante du monde; car aux lieux où la mémoire leur manquoit, ils entreméloient hardiment aux vers, des discours qu'ils composoient sur le champ, lesquels faisoient rire d'autant plus qu'ils estoient souvent un peu éloignez du sujet. Cependant cela fit une si forte impression sur les esprits, que l'on leur donna apres les noms de Comédie qu'ils avoient pris chacun: ce qu'ils trouverent fort agreable pour leurs conversations ordinaires [...]

The dramatic performance of a pastoral tragicomedy by several salonnières is originally destined to honor its author who is also present at the gathering. It is subtly implied that this collective undertaking would be intimidating if the participants were not already good friends (“entre personnes de connoissance”). However, the friendship and trust between the performers and the audience, comprised of the author and the remaining members of the salon, give them the “freedom” to enjoy their enactment without worrying about its reception. When they sometimes forget their lines, instead of panicking, making great efforts to recall them, or stopping the show altogether, the performers “boldly” (“hardiment”) and comically improvise other lines that have little to do with the dramatic context. Because of these playful improvisations, the original tragicomedy progressively degenerates into a motley succession of non sequiturs. Fortunately, the author is not said to take offense. The fact that several members of the salon are familiar with his text and have memorized much of it before they even knew they would be performing it, proves that they have much “affection” for it. At the same time, both the author and the performers do not treat the text as sacrosanct, implied by the ironic use of the verb “profaner.” On the one hand, the interpolations reveal the performers’ pleasure in the dramatic text because it is through them that the play can

continue “hardiment.” On the other hand, these interpolations reflect the performers’ carelessness, one might say a certain irreverence, with regard to the original verses, evoking *la sprezzatura* theorized by Castiglione. This combination of pleasure and carelessness yields an ad hoc production “la plus divertissante du monde” for both performers and audience. These salonniers perform so well precisely because they have little care for their shortcomings or the success of their performance; their pleasure is at the heart of their ability to improvise, so badly and yet with so much success. This experience makes such a strong impression on the performers that they decide to keep the names of their dramatic characters when they resume conversation. The names are a reminder of an ephemeral pleasure that has been shared in a spirit of lightheartedness and affection without affectation, a pleasure that persists even though its object has changed from dramatic enactment to conversation.

The artistic quality of performances by salonniers in the seventeenth century varied considerably, from the excellent singing of Scudéry’s *Clarinte* to the tomfoolery of Sorel’s tragicomedians. It is not that salonniers gave little importance to the quality of their performances, as Goulet intimates. This quality was subjective, conditioned by the affective rapport not only between the performer and the audience, but also between the performer and the art being performed. If Castiglione identifies beauty with morality, salonniers identified the beauty of a performance with the pleasure it procured the performer. The purpose of performance was to allow salonniers to delight in themselves, and to share this delight with an audience of friends. Performance was thus simultaneously egocentric and socially minded.

### *Pleasure in Sight-Reading*

The salonnier's pleasure in performance was not limited to the sheer enjoyment of practicing an art. It was also derived from what was learned through performance. A common performance practice specific to salon culture enabled the performer to easily circumvent the affected desire to impress: sight-reading. This exercise blurred the distinction between performer and listener, for the performer was also a judge of the work being performed. In a salon setting, the undertaking of a sight-reading was motivated by the desire to discover a work for oneself, rather than a desire to show off in front of others. Formally speaking, the work was performing more than the performer, who served rather as an interpreter motivated by curiosity and the joy of learning.

Frequently, the activity of voiced reading enabled salon circles to encounter and judge texts unknown to them. Unpublished manuscripts were especially welcome: poetry, novels, short stories, whether authored by one of the guests or procured through privileged contact with the author. The reading of a manuscript functioned like the sharing of a secret.<sup>60</sup> Interlocutors in a salon setting also read aloud personal letters that they had received, procured, or copied. The style of the "lettre galante," according to the character Plotine in Scudéry's "Conversation de la manière d'écrire des lettres," is easy, natural, and noble all at once, as opposed to the "grandiloquence" of a harangue.<sup>61</sup> Such letters, though ostensibly written for the private reading of the addressee, were most often

---

<sup>60</sup> Charles Sorel recommends that gentlemen read for their mistresses' pleasure "des pieces curieuses qui ne s'impriment point." See Sorel, *Nouveau recueil*, "Les Loix de la galanterie," 34. See also François de La Mothe le Vayer, "Du Bon et du mauvais usage des ré citations," 150: "ces assemblées, où tant de personnes d'honneur & de mérite se trouvent, pour ouïr reciter quelque piece qui n'a point encore veu le jour (...) une composition nouvelle."

<sup>61</sup> Scudéry, "Conversation de la manière d'écrire des lettres" in *De l'air galant" et autres Conversations*, 154.

intended for voiced reading before a salon audience. A voiced reading of a “well spun” letter (“bien tournée”) honors both the reader-addressee and the writer, according to Amilcar in the “Conversation de la manière d’écrire des lettres”: “Ceux qui reçoivent une belle lettre d’amitié se font honneur en la publiant,” that is, by reading it aloud for others.<sup>62</sup> The historian Émile Magne deplores the lack of “sincerity” in the “lettres galantes” of Vincent Voiture, which circulated in salon society.<sup>63</sup> However, Scudéry asserts that such letters are appreciated by salonniers less for their sincerity than for their playfulness and witty expression. Many a salonnier also lent an attentive ear to the “grandiloquence” and intellectual weight of Jean Louis Guez de Balzac’s “lettres sérieuses,”<sup>64</sup> which circulated as freely as the “lettres galantes” of Voiture. The salon practice of reading aloud and listening thus transformed the letter into a literary genre. In addition to circulating manuscripts, salonniers satisfied their desire for novelty by reading

---

<sup>62</sup> Scudéry, “Conversation de la manière d’écrire des lettres” in *De l’air galant” et autres Conversations*, 155.

<sup>63</sup> Magne, *Voiture et les origines de l’Hôtel de Rambouillet*, 92: “[...] si les vers de Voiture contiennent parfois un accent de sincérité, ses lettres d’amour démontrent la sécheresse de son cœur. Elles sont écrites pour la galerie. On les copiera. On les lira aux ruelles. Le style [...] glacé par le douteux imbroglio des métaphores.”

<sup>64</sup> In view of Scudéry’s emphasis in “Conversation de la manière d’écrire des lettres” on the stylistic lightness of the “lettres galantes” intended for salon reading, Delphine Denis has suggested that the circulating letters of Guez de Balzac were reserved exclusively for male and erudite readership (See Scudéry, *De l’air galant” et autres Conversations*, 141). This presumption is only comforted by Scudéry’s reference to the term “urbanité,” famously theorized by Guez de Balzac, in her “Conversation de la politesse” in *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets*, 1:123: “cette grande parole d’Urbanité dont Cleonte s’est servi, l’usage ne l’a pas assez établie pour les Dames, & l’on ne l’emploie que dans des ouvrages d’un caractère élevé, & non pas en une conversation naturelle: en un mot, il la faut laisser aux Sçavans, & à la grande Eloquence.” Guez de Balzac is thus mistaken when he writes in 1644, “Et quand l’usage aura meury parmy nous un mot de si mauvais goust, et corrigé l’amertume de la nouveauté qui s’y peut trouver, nous nous y accoustumerons.” Though Guez de Balzac’s term is not common in salon parlance, his letters on the ancient concept of urbanity and the personality of Mécenas (published as “Discours II” and “Discours V”) are specifically addressed to the marquise de Rambouillet and read aloud in her Chambre bleue. His letter on the comedy *I Suppositi* by Ariosto (“Discours IV”) is addressed to Jean Chapelain, who is engaged in a debate over this play against Vincent Voiture and Julie d’Angennes, daughter of the marquise de Rambouillet. Guez de Balzac’s letter serves to reinforce Chapelain’s position and is read aloud by Chapelain in Rambouillet’s salon. See Guez de Balzac, *Œuvres diverses*, “Discours II, IV, V” and Jouhaud, “Sur le statut d’homme de lettres au XVIIe siècle,” 315-317.

contemporary publications: the *Lettres provinciales* by Blaise Pascal, lengthy novels (“romans fleuves”) by Honoré d’Urfé and Scudéry, poetic anthologies, miscellaneous writings of single authors (e.g., *Ménagiana*), and diverse “gazettes” and “nouvelles” detailing the latest happenings in society.

It is important to note that one’s diction during a voiced reading of prose differed from one’s pronunciation during conversation, and this change in pronunciation was not necessarily attributed to affectation. It served to clearly distinguish between a proper performance of literature and the natural, artless style of conversation.<sup>65</sup> Errors which were perfectly acceptable and even graceful during a conversational exchange would be amplified and bizarre-sounding if pronounced in a reading. Writers recognized the importance of this practice and composed their texts with vocalization in mind.

According to the grammarian Claude Favre de Vaugelas, all writers of prose should have “quelque soin de satisfaire l’oreille, soit pour former la juste mesure d’une période, soit pour les joindre aux mots avec lesquels ils rendent le son plus doux, & la prononciation plus aisée, soit en fin pour empêcher dans la prose la mesure des vers.”<sup>66</sup> For example, whereas the pronunciation of the word “avec” in salon conversation occasionally dropped the [c], in a voiced reading the last consonant was accentuated by an additional [e muet] when in front of another consonant (“avecque lui”). This alteration ensured the intelligibility of the word, while avoiding the unharmonious succession of two

---

<sup>65</sup> Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 39: “[...] on lui passe ses négligences dans le discours ordinaire de la conversation; mais dans la lecture on ne lui pardonne rien.”

<sup>66</sup> Vaugelas, *Remarques sur la langue françoise*, 312: “[...] ceux qui eyscrivent en prose”

consonants.<sup>67</sup> It is interesting that the pronunciation of all “liaisons obligatoires” is currently thought to render spoken French refined and melodious; in the seventeenth century, refinement and pleasantness of pronunciation implied, on the contrary, the omission of many liaisons. Salonnières pronounced “tu parl’*à*” instead of “tu parles *à*,” and “fais*on* un effort” instead of “fais*ons* un effort.” In a voiced reading, however, intelligibility was just as important as mellifluousness, if not more. Morphological features normally silenced in conversation were pronounced in a reading (e.g., “ceux qui pens*ent* avoir raison”). Whereas the [r] at the end of an infinitive was avoided in conversation because of its rough sound, it was categorically pronounced in a reading. Liaisons distinguished a literary pronunciation from an aristocratic one. This distinction has vanished today; it is precisely the literary quality of such liaisons that signifies social refinement, implying that the speaker is cultivated. In the seventeenth century, in order to spare the reader the difficult choice between rendering a text intelligible or pleasant-sounding, the philosopher Bernard Lamy advises writers of poetry and prose to arrange their words in function not only of meaning but of prosody and pronunciation.<sup>68</sup> Jean Léonor Le Gallois de Grimarest, specialist in declamation, reproaches literary publishers who erroneously place accents on words and therefore incite readers to mispronounce

---

<sup>67</sup> Vaugelas, *Remarques sur la langue françoise*, 312: “Je ne voudrois jamais escrire ‘avec vous,’ mais tousjours ‘avecque vous,’ à cause de la rencontre de ces deux rudes consonnes c, & v [...] puis qu’aussi bien on ne sçauroit prononcer avec vous, que de la mesme façon que l’on prononce avecque vous; mais ceux qui lisent avoüeront que rencontrant escrit avec vous, cela leur fait peine [...] Il y a donc des consones devant lesquelles il faut dire avec, & d’autres, devant lesquelles il faut dire avecque, pour la douceur de la prononciation [...] il suffit de consulter sa langue et son oreille pour cela.”

<sup>68</sup> Lamy, *L’art de parler*, 130: “il faut relever la cadence d’un mot trop foible par celle de celui qui aura une forte prononciation, temperer la trop grande force des uns par la douceur des autres, faire que la prononciation des mots precedens dispose la voix pour prononcer les suivans [...] ce que j’ay dit suffit pour faire faire reflexion à ceux qui veulent écrire avec soin sur ce qu’il est necessaire de considerer dans l’arrangement des mots.”



them.<sup>69</sup> Thus, seventeenth-century writers of any type of prose composed not only for the “inner ear” of silent reading, but for vocalization as well.

For Grimarest, the quality of this vocalized reading reflects directly on the reader, even more so than on the text. Grimarest considers literary sight-reading to be a difficult performance art. It requires “de l’étude, de l’éducation, du goût, du commerce.”<sup>70</sup>

Readers must not only pronounce the words correctly and pleasantly, but spontaneously understand the text as they proceed through it, never to be caught by surprise. They must be able to anticipate the “passions” and “figures” of future passages based on the current passage in order to deliver them with appropriate vocal inflections.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, they must develop the capacity to visually read ahead of their voice.<sup>72</sup> Grimarest thus asserts that a salon sight-reading is far more impressive than any actor’s performance of the same text: “celui-là est maître de son action, il en a étudié les différens mouvemens; il a eu le tems de pénétrer le sens de l’ouvrage [...] Mais celui qui lit prononce à l’avanture, & quand il rencontre, son mérite est plus grand que celui de l’Acteur.”<sup>73</sup> The sight-reader must give the impression of being perfectly familiar with the text, as if it were being recited from

---

<sup>69</sup> Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 9: “Mais les Imprimeurs (car je ne veux point accuser les Auteurs de l’ignorance que je vais reprocher à ceux-là) ne sachant point l’effet que doivent produire ces deux points, les emploient Presque toujours mal à propos [...] car ils écrivent *feuille*, & *rouille*, au lieu de *feuille* & *rouille*; ce qui feroit faire véritablement une faute de prononciation à un [...] Lecteur, prévenu de l’effet de ces deux points, en prononçant *feu-ille*, *rou-ille*.”

<sup>70</sup> Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 191.

<sup>71</sup> Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 99-100: “[...] il faut avoir contracté l’habitude de prévoir les mouvemens par les premiers termes qui les expriment: car une passion, une figure mal touchée ne fait point de plaisir à l’Auditeur [...] [il faut] deviner les mouvemens qui doivent suivre ceux que l’on fait sentir actuellement: ce n’est pas une chose aisée.”

<sup>72</sup> Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 81: “il est nécessaire de contracter une grande habitude avec les mots; de sorte que l’on puisse lire mentalement la ligne qui suit celle que l’on prononce.”

<sup>73</sup> Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 121.

memory. According to Grimarest, sight-reading is a performance that serves primarily to demonstrate the “merit” of the performer, and he adds, “il n’y a personne qui ne sache aussi bien que moi, que c’est par ce moyen que bien des gens ont fait leur fortune, & ont gagné les bonnes grâces de leurs Maîtres.”<sup>74</sup> He encourages salonnières to develop this art in order to be in a position to show off in front of their interlocutors. With the desire to show off, however, came the risk of appearing affected.

Though Grimarest treated the text as a pretext for the performer to shine, and though the reader certainly merited the admiration of the circle upon an excellent delivery, I believe that the art of sight-reading formally underplayed its own performance. Sight-readings were proposed in salon circles in order to expose and judge texts unknown to the performer as well as the listeners. The collective discovery of the text is what motivated and justified its performance. A salonnier’s sight-reading was different from a sight-reading in the context of a musical audition, for example, in which the work is already well known to the listeners who are testing the performer’s skill. Salon sight-reading put the text to the test, first and foremost. The text performed through the voice of the reader which, if used properly according to the guidelines specified by Grimarest, served as a transparent medium of conveyance. The ideal reader was paradoxically both expressive and discreet. Self-aggrandizement and affectation had no place in this performance art. The performer did not use the text to solicit admiration: the text used the reader.

Other contemporary representations of sight-reading suggest that this practice served first to deepen the reader’s understanding of a text, and only accessorially to incite

---

<sup>74</sup> Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 76.

admiration for the reader. Méré describes in his “Discours de l’esprit” moments when the duchess des Lesdiguières, after listening to him read out loud a reputable work, asks him to hand over the book in order to test the text’s ideas, passions, and expressions in her own voice:

[...] après avoir longtemps discouru, vous me faisiez souvent lire, et qu’ainsi vous lisiez vous-mesme, et quand vous remarquiez quelque défaut dans la justesse, ou dans le bon air, j’en cherchois la cause avec vous, Madame, et quelquefois je vous aidais à rajuster de certains endroits comme ils devaient être, au moins selon vôtre goust, que je tiens le plus pur, et le plus parfait au monde. Je voyais qu’en tout ce que nous lisions de considerable, vous estiez sensiblement touchée, un peu plus, un peu moins, selon que vous le deviez estre.<sup>75</sup>

It is by vocalizing the text that Lesdiguières notices its slight faults and proceeds to edit them according to her taste. She performs the text primarily for herself in order to enhance her understanding and appreciation. Then, almost as an afterthought, Méré qualifies her voiced reading as a performance for him: “Je voyais qu’en tout ce que nous lisions de considerable, vous estiez sensiblement touchée, un peu plus, un peu moins, selon que vous le deviez estre.” The expression “tout ce que nous lisions” makes it unclear whether Lesdiguière’s reactions occur as she is listening to Méré read or as she is reading aloud. This ambiguity between reader and listener underlies the art of sight-reading: the performer reads only to listen and judge. In a separate letter to the duchess, Méré marvels at Lesdiguière’s “science” of vocal expressiveness:

Mais ce qui me plaît et que j’admire c’est quand vous faites quelquefois un discours suivy de commencer toujours par le ton qui vient le mieux à vous expliquer, d’en changer selon les choses que vous avez à dire [...] Cette différence du ton ne vient pas tant d’élever ou d’abaisser la voix, que de s’en servir d’une manière imperceptible et néanmoins conforme à ce qui se passe dans le cœur [...] Cette science s’étend bien loin et peu de gens l’ont acquise en perfection.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Méré, “Discours de l’esprit,” 2:94.

<sup>76</sup> Méré, “A Madame la Duchesse de Lesdiguières” in *Lettres*, 20-21. See also Méré, “A Madame la Duchesse de Lesdiguières” in *Lettres*, 99-100: “Je vous avoué que la pluspart des personnes de la Cour, & sur tout les Dames croioient ou feignoient de croire que le plaisir qu’on prend à vous entendre parler, vient plutôt de vostre bouche & de vos tons que de vos sentimens & de vos pensées. Car il est vray que jamais personne n’a parlé comme vous.”

In order to fully appreciate the text at hand, Lesdiguières must perform it with her vocal inflections and her passions. Literary sight-reading is an aesthetic and cognitive experience for the performer, understood in this context as “doer” or “executor” more than “entertainer.”

Sight-reading required a remarkable effort on the part of the performer. The salonnières in Michel de Pure’s novel *La Prétieuse* consider the activity to be “une peine.”<sup>77</sup> Likewise, the literary theorist Jean-Baptiste Dubos declares in his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* that reading is “en quelque façon une peine” for the silent reader’s eyes, in contrast with the pleasure procured from looking at a painting. Even if the typeset is visually pleasing (i.e., clearly printed, well proportioned), the mind’s eye still has the burden of turning words into meaning. Dubos concludes that meaning is more easily grasped through the ears than through the eyes: “La récitation des vers est donc un plaisir pour nos oreilles, au lieu que leur lecture est un travail pour nos yeux.”<sup>78</sup> Salon sight-reading required the reader to exercise both the eyes and the voice to spontaneously transform words into meaning for oneself and one’s listeners. This effort was not commensurate with affectation, because it was supposed to serve the representation and intelligibility of the text, rather than the image of the reader-performer.

In her representations of salon culture, Scudéry similarly portrays musical sight-reading as a performance for one’s own edification, a purpose which safeguards the performer from affectation. Her “Conversation de la Paresse” takes place in a “Cabinet

---

<sup>77</sup> De Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 1:307: “Madame, adjouste Eulalie, s’adressant à Aracie, aurez-vous la bonté d’accorder à Sophronisbe, & à toute la compagnie, la lecture de cette description. Il ne vous en coustera qu’une peine, & elle nous vaudra deux plaisirs.”

<sup>78</sup> Dubos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, 406-408.

de la nonchalance” situated in a vast private garden. Hanging on the inner walls of the cabin are four paintings, each with a poetic tribute to Laziness, Nonchalance, Idleness, and Negligence. These four inscriptions combine to form the four stanzas of a musically strophic air. The music of this air (which does not appear in Scudéry’s text) is notated on a brass slab attached to the base of the middle painting, thus presumably visible to someone reading any of the four inscriptions. Painting, poetry, and music are thus combined in the delightfully synesthetic décor of the small cabin. Artemire, the female narrator, sight-reads the music and text in the presence of her friend Clarinte while they await the arrival of their friends: “Après avoir lû ces Vers je les chantay; car comme je sçay passablement la Musique, je voulus voir si l’air estoit aussi singulier que les paroles.”<sup>79</sup> Artemire, a composite name joining “arte” and “mire” (from the verb “mirer,” meaning “to examine closely”), uses her voice to sound out the union between each stanza and the single melody. She would have done the same in her friend’s absence, for this sight-reading is not a performance for another, but a solitary undertaking.

When their friends arrive, they all convene in another hall to enjoy a meal. Before everyone returns to the “Cabinet de la nonchalance,” the gentleman Poligene secretly places cards beneath the four original inscriptions. His cards contain each a hand-written quatrain condemning Laziness, Nonchalance, Idleness, and Negligence. When the other salonniers discover this “enchantement,” Artemire immediately invites the gentleman Telamon, “qui a de la voix,” to sing all eight quatrains with her in the form of a dialogue. In this spontaneous performance, Artemire is singing before the circle

---

<sup>79</sup> Scudéry, “Conversation de la Paresse” in *Conversations morales*, 1:160-161.

what she has already sight-read in private, while Telamon sight-reads the new text on the same melody. Everyone is discovering how these antithetical texts speak to each other and through the same music. Artemire and Telamon's vocal performance is "well received" by the others. By associating Artemire's private singing with Telamon's salon singing, the author seems to instill Telamon's sight-reading with the unassuming quality of nonperformance that characterizes Artemire's. Though they are concentrating on the execution of this strange duet, their attitude toward its reception is nonchalant, not coincidentally in this "Cabinet de la nonchalance." The circle's enthusiastic reception comes as compensation for their effort. However, this effort is made out of the singers' curiosity to see how the text and music fit together.

Sight-reading in the salon offered the performer and listeners the pleasure of discovery, the pleasure of learning. The reader's mission to impress was to be overshadowed by the performing text. The confusion between reader and listener, performer and judge, effort and enjoyment, formally precluded the dangers of affectation.

IMAGE NOT AVAILABLE

*Intérieur d'appartements, concerts*  
 "Femme de qualité à sa Toilette"  
 (anonymous, late seventeenth century)  
 BnF: Oa. 52, Reprise "Grands Formats" C 910

*Intérieur d'appartements, concerts*  
 "Dame de Qualité Chantant"  
 (anonymous, late seventeenth century)  
 BnF: Oa. 52, C 1009

**Figure 1**

### A “Writerly” Performance

Thus salonniers took pleasure in fresh and/or unknown manuscripts and publications, literary and/or musical, consumed collectively through the voiced reading of one. Dubos contrasts this obsession with novelty among salonniers with the Ancients who never tired of listening to poems that they knew by heart.<sup>80</sup> However, salon voiced readings were not limited to sight-readings, as is revealed in the *Correspondance* of Sévigné. Her son Charles de Sévigné enjoys poring through classic literature which he has read numerous times and knows by heart. Unlike the sight-reader, Charles openly approaches his voiced readings as the actor described by Grimarest. They are performances intended to entertain the listeners in his mother’s salon circle, to bespeak his literary sensibility, and to breathe new life into old and familiar texts.

Sévigné’s descriptions of her son’s voiced readings are unabashedly enthusiastic. Here is an example from a letter written to her daughter, Mme de Grignan:

Le baron est ici, qui ne me laisse pas mettre le pied à terre, tant il me mène rapidement dans les lectures que nous entreprenons; ce n'est toutefois qu'après avoir fait honneur à la conversation. Dom Quichotte, Lucien, les *petites lettres*, voilà ce qui nous occupe. Je voudrais de tout mon cœur, ma fille, que vous eussiez vu de quel air et de quel ton il s'acquitte de cette dernière lecture. Elles ont pris un tour particulier quand elles ont passé par ses mains; c'est une chose entièrement divine, et pour le sérieux et pour la parfaite raillerie. Elles me sont toujours nouvelles.<sup>81</sup>

Charles’s enthusiasm for Pascal’s *Lettres provinciales* is infectious for his listeners. The “air” and “tone” of his voiced reading breathes new life into this salon favorite from the 1650’s. His ability to change his vocal tone from “serious” to “playful” revives the

---

<sup>80</sup> Dubos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, 410: “Les Romains, qui joignoient souvent d'autres plaisirs au plaisir de la table, faisoient lire quelquefois durant le repas Homere, Virgile, et les poètes excellens, quoique la plupart des convives dussent sçavoir par coeur une partie des vers dont on leur faisoit entendre la lecture. Mais les Romains comptoient que le plaisir du rithme et de l'harmonie dût suppléer au mérite de la nouveauté qui manquoit à ces vers.”

<sup>81</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 2:498.

dynamism of the text, making it fully present, ever evolving.<sup>82</sup> Charles sweeps his mother's guests off their feet, not only when he reads plays, which he performs "like Molière," but also when he reads aloud poetry, novels, and histories. His readings of Rabelais are reportedly "à mourir de rire."<sup>83</sup> When he reads aloud these well-known texts, neither the performer nor the audience is encountering the text for the first time. The audience concentrates on what the reader is bringing to the text. Sévigné and her son favor texts that can be represented dramatically by the voice, unlike the "abstract" writings preferred by her daughter.<sup>84</sup> When he rereads with his mother the plays of Corneille, they are content to relive their initial admiration without necessarily searching for new elements to appreciate.<sup>85</sup> An inexhaustible pleasure in the same texts, read cover to cover, is shared between mother and son, again in contrast with Mme de Grignan's habit of impatiently scanning works for the good parts.<sup>86</sup> Sévigné does not hesitate to point out that her daughter's manner of reading is not leisurely enough.<sup>87</sup> She does not

---

<sup>82</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 1:296: Sévigné remarks, "il y a bien de la différence entre lire un livre toute seule, ou avec des gens qui entendent & relèvent les beaux endroits & qui, par là, réveillent l'attention."

<sup>83</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 1:276.

<sup>84</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 2:966: "Il me faudra toujours quelque petite histoire, car je suis grossière comme votre frère. Les choses abstraites vous sont naturelles et nous sont contraires."

<sup>85</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 2:259: "Nous avons relu des pièces de Corneille, et repassé avec plaisir sur toutes nos vieilles admirations."

<sup>86</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 3:786: "Je suis assurée que vous ne les avez jamais lues qu'en courant, grappillant les endroits plaisants, mais ce n'est point cela quand on les lit à loisir"; Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 1:292: "J'achève tous les livres, et vous les commencez. Cela s'ajusterait fort bien si nous étions ensemble, et fournirait même beaucoup à notre conversation"; Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 1:280: "Mais si vous en demeurez à la moitié, je vous gronde; vous ferez tort à la majesté du sujet [...] Je ne pardonne ce manque de courage qu'aux romans, que vous n'aimez pas."

<sup>87</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 1:296: "*Cléopâtre* va son train, sans empressement toutefois; c'est aux heures perdues."



take her time to savor the subtle qualities of the text.<sup>88</sup> She finds no amusement in reading what she has read in the past.<sup>89</sup> Mother and son understand and share a leisurely enjoyment of literature, classic texts of both the “Anciens” and the “Modernes.”

Charles’s practice of voiced reading renders classic literature “writerly” in a Barthesian sense. In *S/Z* Barthes laments “le divorce impitoyable” between the text and the reader who merely judges it as good or bad, instead of engaging with that text and risking a unique interpretation of it: “Ce lecteur est alors plongé dans une sorte d’oisiveté, d’intransitivité, et, pour tout dire, de *sérieux*: au lieu de jouer lui-même [...] il ne lui reste plus en partage que la pauvre liberté de recevoir ou de rejeter le texte: la lecture n’est plus qu’un *referendum*.”<sup>90</sup> Unlike this “readerly” text, a “writerly” text is one in which the reader dares to appropriate it, to assume a part in its production. Thus, Sévigné writes about Charles: “Mon fils a une qualité très commode, c’est qu’il est fort aise de relire deux fois, trois fois, ce qu’il a trouvé beau. Il le goûte, il y entre davantage, il le sait par cœur; cela s’incorpore. Il croit avoir fait ce qu’il lit ainsi pour la troisième fois. Il lit *l’Abbadie* avec transport, et admirant son esprit d’avoir fait une si belle chose.”<sup>91</sup> Charles is repeatedly performing a text that gives him pleasure until it has been “absorbed,” until it is his. Through his reading performance, he re-produces the text, instilling it with a

---

<sup>88</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 3:834: “Vous souvient-il quand votre frère lisait cette comédie de votre fils et de Sanzei? On en pouvait s’empêcher d’en rire en le regardant. Il est donc entré, et sa femme comme moi, dans cette jolie scène, sentant les beaux endroits [...]”

<sup>89</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 3:833: “Vous dites que j’ai relu trois fois les mêmes romans; cela est offensant [...] Il y a plus de bien que de mal à cette qualité docile, qui fait honneur à ce qui est bon, et qui est si propre à occuper agréablement certains temps de la vie. Enfin, ma fille, je vous la souhaiterais, cette qualité”; Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 2:166: “M De Montmoron a été ici deux ou trois jours pour des affaires [...] Nous relûmes la mort de Clorinde. Ma bonne, ne dites point: *je la sais par coeur*, relisez-la et voyez comme tout ce combat et ce baptême est conduit [...]”

<sup>90</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris, Seuil, 1989), 10.

<sup>91</sup> See Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 3:804.

unique meaning reflecting his past readings and the emergent qualities of the present moment. Listening to her son read canonic works, Sévigné occasionally feels as if she has lost her memory and were encountering these texts for the first time.<sup>92</sup> Grimarest recommends that salonniers sight-read new texts as if they were already familiar to them. Sévigné marvels at her son's ability to render familiar texts "new" to her through his voiced readings. Charles's performance is not only intended to solicit admiration for himself. He is genuinely interested in discovering new textual meaning and beauty through his "writerly" form of reading.

In a letter to the duchesse des Lesdiguières, Méré describes a young man's voiced reading of a well-known text, though which he succeeds in seducing his listener, who is a married woman.<sup>93</sup> When they meet, she mentions that she is fond of readings "d'un ton agréable" of *Astrée* by Honoré d'Urfé and *La Gerusalemme liberate* by Torquato Tasso. When she asks the young man if he knows how to read, her provincial husband scoffs at what he perceives to be a foolish question. "Il y a, dit-elle, plus de mystere à lire qu'on ne pense," a statement revealing that she is of delicate sensibility. Thereafter, the young man privately rehearses voiced readings of these texts, endeavoring to tune his voice to the subtlety of her ear:

Que je serois heureux [...] si je me pouvois insinüer dans son cœur! Le meilleur moyen qui s'en presente dépend de bien lire; il faut donc que je tâche de luy plaire en tirant la quint-essence de tous les agrémens qui la peuvent toucher par la meilleure manière de lire; elle consiste à bien prononcer les mots, & d'un ton conforme au sujet du discours, que ma parole la flate sans

---

<sup>92</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 3:27: "Votre pauvre frère est tout chagrin. Il a raison, en vérité; je n'ai jamais vu un garçon si malheureux. Je tâche de le consoler. Nous lisons beaucoup, et je sens le plaisir de n'avoir point de mémoire, car les comédies de Corneille, les ouvrages de Despréaux, celles de Sarasin, celles de Voiture, tout repasse devant moi sans m'ennuyer, au contraire"; Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 3:807: "Je relis même avec mon fils de certaines choses que j'avais lues en courant à Paris et qui me paraissent toutes nouvelles."

<sup>93</sup> Méré, *Lettres*, "A Madame la Duchesse de Lesdiguières," 45-60.

l'endormir, qu'elle l'éveille sans la choquer, que j'use d'inflexions pour ne la pas lasser, que je prononce tendrement & d'une voix mourante les choses tendres; mais d'une façon si tempérée qu'elle n'y sente rien d'affecté. Je fis en peu de jours tant de progrès en cette estude qu'elle ne se plaisoit plus qu'à me faire lire & qu'à s'entretenir avec moy.<sup>94</sup>

Here the art of voiced reading is used not to pleurably (re)discover a famous text, but to demonstrate that the reader is of the same “sentiment délicat” as his listener. It is synonymous with the art of seduction. Much time is privately spent perfecting his reading performance, endeavoring to find just the right tone for each passage. He recognizes that his concerted effort to achieve a unique, appealing delivery, to focus attention on himself through the text, and not vice versa, may reveal itself in performance as affectation: “[...] mais d'une façon si tempérée qu'elle n'y sente rien d'affecté.” He must therefore temper the manifestation of passion in his voice and body when he performs his readings. This passion corresponds not only with the content of the texts, but with his secret desire for his listener. The art of seduction requires “de l'estude” and “de la tendresse,” on the one hand, and the dissimulation of one's affectation and affection, on the other. The reader excites his listener's admiration through his artful, sensitive delivery; he kindles her affection by not falling into affectation. As Méré's letter suggests, the voiced reading of a well-known text serves to showcase the reader as performer of the text. The risk of affectation is therefore greater.

One type of “writerly” performance revealed the merits of both the work and the reader: when authors read aloud their texts. The salon sometimes served as a testing-ground for a text prior to its publication and/or stage performance (e.g., Corneille's reading of *Polyeucte* at the hôtel de Rambouillet, Molière's reading of *L'Avare* for the salon of Mlle Honorée Le Bel de Bussy). Authors approached these private

---

<sup>94</sup> Méré, *Lettres*, “A Madame la Duchesse de Lesdiguières,” 60.

performances as opportunities to promote their works in elite circles. They invited feedback from their salon audience, whether or not they cared to modify their texts upon receiving this critique.<sup>95</sup> In many instances, these authorial reading performances served to condition the general reception and interpretation of their works.<sup>96</sup> Certain authors, like Molière and Boileau, were as famous for their texts as for their voiced readings of these texts. *L'Art poétique*, the literary treatise by the “legislator of Parnassus” Nicolas Boileau, prescribes the styles and genres defining what would subsequently be considered French “classical literature.” Written in pleasing, elegant verse, this treatise also exemplifies the French “classical” style of poetry. It is often forgotten that *L'Art poétique* was also a playful entertainment piece when read aloud and brought to life by its author, whose dramatic verve rivaled that of Molière.<sup>97</sup> Sévigné invited Boileau to read aloud this literary treatise in order to amuse the cardinal de Retz, just as she invited Corneille and Molière to read their comedies for him.<sup>98</sup> Each voiced reading thus served

---

<sup>95</sup> Amonoo, “Les rapports entre les salons et la tragédie au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” 292: “En somme le génie de Corneille est resté le plus souvent imperméable [...] Par contre, Racine, plus souple courtisan et mondain que Corneille, a mieux saisi [...] les suggestions émanant de la société contemporaine et des salons.”

<sup>96</sup> Maître, *Les précieuses*, 492: “[...] l’auteur en personne vient y lire sa production avec le ton qui convient, fournit le sens qu’il autorise.” Gédéon Tallemant des Réaux recalls in his *Historiettes* that Jean Ogier de Gombauld was invited to read his novel *Endymion* in numerous salons, including the chambers of Queen Marie de Médicis: “Il fit l’*Endymion* durant qu’il étoit le mieux. Ce livre fit un furieux bruit [...] La Reine témoigna de le vouloir entendre lire, car il avoit beaucoup de réputation, et effectivement c’est un beau songe. Pour lui, il y entend cent mystères que les autres ne comprennent pas, car il dit que c’est une image de la vie de la cour, et que qui le lira avec cet esprit y trouvera beaucoup plus de satisfaction. Il en avoit tant fait de lectures avant que de le faire imprimer.” See Tallemant des Réaux, *Historiettes*, 1:554.

<sup>97</sup> Along with Racine, Boileau was one of the best declaimers in his day. In 1689, he was summoned by Madame de Maintenon to train the students at the École de Saint-Cyr in preparation for their premiere performance of Racine’s *Esther* (see chapter 4 of the present study). Moreover, Boileau was notorious for his talent as an impersonator. See W. H. Lewis, *The Splendid Century / Life in the France of Louis XIV* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1953), 278: “And Louis liked nothing better than to get Boileau aside and draw him on to mimic the courtiers, for he was amongst other things an excellent mimic.”

<sup>98</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 1:452: “Nous tâchons d’amuser notre cher cardinal. Corneille lui a lu une comédie qui sera jouée dans quelque temps, et qui fait souvenir des anciennes. Molière lui lira samedi Tricotin, qui est une fort plaisante pièce. Despréaux lui donnera son *lutrin* et sa *poétique*.”

to reveal the merits of both the text and its author-performer. Whereas Sévigné found Boileau “amusing,” Balthasar de Bonnacorse was not at all amused by Boileau’s readings at salon gatherings. In his poetic satire *Lutrigot*, Bonnacorse accuses Boileau of ambition, narcissism, and an affected manner of soliciting applause when he reads his *Lutrin* for salonniers:

Lutrigot tout rempli de projets éclatans,  
Va relire avec soin ses écrits importants,  
Et content de sa peine, et de son grand ouvrage,  
Ce narcisse orgueilleux se mire à chaque page.  
Il ne consulte plus que son ambition,  
Il veut bien qu’il paroisse avant l’impression,  
Il le lit à Garrine, il le lit à Rigelle,  
Il va le reciter de ruelle en ruelle,  
Il mandie en tous lieux quelque applaudissement,  
Et par son ton de voix il impose aisément.

Because any author was personally implicated in the performance of his text, a certain degree of affectation reflecting his desire to impress was probably expected.

The practice of sight-reading in a salon setting generally used the artistic merit and creative input of the reader to showcase the text being read. This shift of attention is what safeguarded the sight-reader’s performance from affectation. Castiglione recommends a duality between the performing body and the indifferent mind. Salon sight-reading was also characterized by a duality, for readers were both performers and judges, producers and receivers of art. By emphasizing the latter portion of this duality, they downplayed their own performance and thereby undermined the appearance of affectation. By showing that they were just as “serious” as their listeners about discovering the work for themselves and deriving pleasure from it, sight-readers could remain aristocratically nonchalant vis-à-vis their own performance.

### *The Pleasure of Parody*

The aforementioned duet between the characters Artemire and Telamon in Scudéry's "Conversation de la Paresse" is what was referred to as a "parody." Frequently, a vocal air for salon performance entailed a melody composed to a preexistent text. The text and melody originally found in the "Cabinet de la nonchalance" were undoubtedly composed in this manner. A parody, also commonly referred to as a "canevas," was an air in which the music was preexistent, referred to as a "timbre." The text was then composed to more or less "fit" this musical mold. In the "Conversation de la Paresse," Poligène's hand-written quatrains based on the original stanzas constitute a parody. The performance of parody was approached by singers as a curious experiment in which a text was joined with music not intended for it. Obviously, the emerging work required a proper singing performance to do it justice. However, salonniers offering to sound out parodies were expected to be more interested in the quality of the parody than in the quality of their own performance. Their desire to impress and any resulting affectation were supposed to give way to the thrill of experimental discovery. As seen above, Artemire and Telamon follow this performance protocol closely, as does the character Eulalie in *La Prétieuse, ou Le mystère des ruelles*, a novel by the abbé Michel de Pure.

Before proceeding to the parody in de Pure's novel, it will be useful to provide some background information on the parody as a musico-poetic genre and its practice in salon culture. The music of a parody originated from either an instrumental or a vocal piece. In the latter case, the rhyme scheme of the new text did not necessarily have to preserve that of the original text. Still, certain prosodic features that had originally shaped the

musical phrasing were necessarily carried over. As for subject matter, affective content, and stylistic elements, seventeenth-century parodies demonstrated more liberty vis-à-vis the original texts. The practice is briefly evoked by Goulet with respect to religious parodies of secular airs, a phenomenon more thoroughly explored by the musicologists Thomas Leconte, Thierry Favier, and Georgie Durosoir.<sup>99</sup> Their studies illuminate not only the musical confrontation (or convergence) between the profane and the sacred in salon culture, but also the purpose, appeal, and poetics of vocal parody in general. In my consultation of primary sources representing salon culture, I have found most vocal parodies to be secular, not religious:<sup>100</sup> a well-known instrumental or vocal melody is united with freshly composed poetry in order to create an *air sérieux*.

Parodic poetry was not expected to be of excellent quality, for it was subjected to preexistent musical constraints. The music dictated its meter on poetic meter, its rhythms on poetic prosody, and its melodic structure on poetic inflection.<sup>101</sup> According to

---

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Leconte, "Musique et spiritualité personnelle en France sous le règne de Louis XIII" in *Concert: Parodies spirituelles au temps de Louis XIII* (Versailles: Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles, Nov. 19, 2005), 9-17. Thierry Favier, "Plaisir musical et parodies spirituelles: les visages multiples de la réminiscence" and "Bénigne de Bacilly et ses airs spirituels: pédagogue aigri ou précurseur inspiré?" Georgie Durosoir, "Timbre et geste créateur: compatibilités et antimonies" and the other articles in the first part of *Timbre und Vaudeville: zur Geschichte und Problematik einer populären Gattung im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*.

<sup>100</sup> See Maître, *Les précieuses*, 449: Salonnières "chantent, sur des mélodies connues le plus souvent, les vers de Benserade, Pellisson, Perrin, Quinault, Segrais, ainsi que ceux de Mme La Suze et de Mme Deshoulières." The popularity of secular parodies is attested in the play *La Comédie des Chansons* by Charles Sorel. Thomas Leconte has determined that many of the songs quoted in this play were secular vocal parodies. See his article "La Comédie de chansons et son répertoire d'airs," 297.

<sup>101</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau's description of the "canevas" in the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert reads as follows: "On donne ce nom à des mots sans aucune suite, que les Musiciens mettent sous un air, qu'ils veulent faire chanter après qu'il aura été exécuté par l'orchestre & la danse. Ces mots servent de modèle au Poète pour en arranger d'autres de la même mesure, & qui forment un sens [...] presque toutes les chaconnes de Lully, ainsi que ses passacailles ont été parodiées par Quinault; c'est dans ces canevas que l'on trouve des vers de neuf syllabes, dont le repos est à la troisième; ce Poète admirable ne s'en est servi que dans ces occasions." See *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Projet (Winter 2008 Edition), Robert Morrissey (ed), <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/>.

Grimarest, the parodic text is a mere accessory to the music: “Cependant comme le Canevas n’est point ordinairement fort essentiel à une piece, il n’est pas dangereux qu’il flechisse un peu sous la musique: mais les autres paroles doivent absolument la dominer pour plaire.”<sup>102</sup> Bacilly describes vocal parodies as “Paroles oyseuses” and not “faites avec esprit.”<sup>103</sup> Still, many salonniers tried their hand at composing secular parodies.<sup>104</sup> What might explain the popularity of this practice? The musical frame provided amateur poets with a structure within which they could compose, thus sparing them the difficulty of working *ex nihilo*. Perhaps the poet hoped that by attaching his text to a popular melody, the poetry could benefit parasitically from the music’s popularity.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, if the versification proved to be faulty, the constraints imposed by the music provided a convenient excuse.

Parodic poetry may have been qualified as “Paroles oyseuses” forced to bend to the dictates of preexistent music, but all poetry married to music risked being compromised. Grimarest criticizes music’s manner of exaggerating and quantifying into

---

<sup>102</sup> Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 214.

<sup>103</sup> Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 116, 108.

<sup>104</sup> Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 213: “Et comme le Poète & le Musicien n’en savent par ordinairement plus l’un que l’autre, pour allier le caractere de la musique avec celui des paroles, delà vient que nous essayons souvent le chant ridicule de tres-mauvais Canevas.” Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 116-117: “des Paroles que l’on pourroit nommer à bon droit des *Paroles oyseuses* & qui pourtant ont le privilege d’ériger mille gens en Auteurs.”

<sup>105</sup> See Antoine Furetière’s judgment of vocal airs in general in *Le Roman bourgeois: ouvrage comique* (1666) (Millwood, NY: Kraus reprint, 1982), 137-138: “il faut que [les vers] soient mis en Musique pour estre bien estimez [...] c’est pour cela que vous voyez tous ces petits Poètes caresser Lambert, le Camus, Boesset [...] — On ne peut nier (dit Philalete) que cette invention ne soit bonne pour se mettre fort en vogue, car c’est un moyen pour faire chanter leurs vers par les plus belles bouches de la cour, et leur faire ensuite courir le monde. Outre que la beauté de l’air est une espèce de fard qui trompe et qui esbloüit: Et j’ai vu estimer beaucoup de choses quand ou les chantoit, qui estoient sur le papier de purs galimathias, où il n’y avoit ny raison ny finesse. — Je les compare volontiers (reprit Charroselles) à des images mal enluminées, qui, estant couvertes d’un talc ou d’un verre, passent pour des tableaux dans un oratoire. — Et moi (dit Pancrace) à un habit de droguet, enrichy de broderie par le caprice d’un seigneur.”



“measures” and “intervals” the subtle, unquantifiable rhythms, intonations, and accents of spoken recitation:

C'est une grande question de savoir si la Musique ajoute à la passion, ou si elle la diminue [...] la passion ne sauroit être exprimée que par les accens, par la prononciation, & par les gestes qui lui sont propres. Or il est impossible, en conservant les regles de la Musique, de donner à la passion ce que je viens de dire; il n'y a que la seule Déclamation qui puisse le faire. Donc toute passion assujettie aux intervalles, & aux mesures de la Musique, perd de sa force [...] la passion ne sauroit être mesurée. Si la Musique vocale cause communément du plaisir, c'est qu'on est dédommagé du tort que les intervalles font aux paroles, par la voix agréable, & par l'artifice de l'Acteur, qui quand il a le sentiment juste, s'écarte des mesures de la Musique pour approcher le plus qu'il peut de la manière dont la passion doit être exprimée.<sup>106</sup>

Le Compositeur, comme je l'ai déjà remarqué, étant souvent contraint par les regles de son art, de déranger la quantité des syllabes, c'est à un habile Acteur à suppléer à ce défaut, en faisant longues les syllabes qui doivent l'être, & breves, celles qui sont breves, sans faire attention à la longueur, ou à la brièveté de la note, à laquelle elles sont assujetties [...] Et il est si vrai que l'on doit en user de cette manière dans les endroits passionnés, que l'on n'y doit point battre la mesure, parceque l'Acteur doit être le maître de son chant pour le rendre conforme à son expression; & l'accompagnement doit aussi être assujetti à sa manière de chanter.<sup>107</sup>

Music follows certain “rules” that are foreign to the verbal expression of passion. By imposing discrete intervals on vocal inflection and measured rhythms on prosody, Grimarest argues that music renders this expression stilted, unpleasing, and unmoving.<sup>108</sup> He therefore instructs salonniers to fight against the artificial constraints that music imposes on speech when they perform songs. Without disrupting the musical harmony and meter, they are expected to subtly alter the vocal line's intonations and rhythms. This spontaneous editing requires singers with “le sentiment juste.” Grimarest maintains that these modifications are not the responsibility of the composer, who is governed by

<sup>106</sup> Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 196-198.

<sup>107</sup> Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 218-219. Jacques Lacombe will observe the same “rhythm-bending” among French singers in *Le spectacle des beaux Arts* (Paris: Hardy, 1758), 316: “[La mesure] est en Italie l'ame de la Musique, c'est elle qui gouverne le Musicien dans l'exécution; au contraire en France, c'est le Musicien qui gouverne la mesure; il est même assez ordinaire que le Chanteur la ralentisse ou la précipite à son gré; de plus, le gout l'engage souvent à ne le point faire sentir.”

<sup>108</sup> It is believed, however, that both Molière and Racine used musical notation in rehearsal in order to guide their actors in their declamation. Presumably, the melodic and rhythmic “intervals” were softened and naturalized during performance. Still, as Lionel de La Laurencie recounts in *Lully* (Paris, 1911), 172: “Dans un passage de *Mithridate*, la Champmeslé baissait la voix pour reprendre à l'octave au-dessus, et, par ce port de voix extraordinaire, elle exprimait le désordre d'esprit dans lequel se trouve Monime.”

the rules of his medium,<sup>109</sup> but rather that of the performer. Jean l’Evangéliste d’Arras, author of the immensely popular collection of religious parodies *La Philomèle séraphique*, similarly insists on the singer’s “ear” for both diction and music. One must be able to adapt the notes gracefully to the words when necessary (e.g., bending notated rhythms and using one’s pronunciation to modify musical accents), without detriment to either. He adds that the genre of the air is particularly flexible with regard to interpretation:

Si quelques uns trouvent que d’aucunes paroles ne coulent pas facilement avec l’air, je les prie de croire qu’il faut tourner l’Air et accommoder la voix selon l’humeur & l’esprit des paroles, comme font tous ceux qui ont la grace de chanter [...] c’est autre chose d’une musique formelle et autre chose des Airs, il faut que la musique formelle soit exacte aux notes, & non ainsi des Airs, pour ce que la musique se chante à la mesure, & les airs à l’oreille [...]<sup>110</sup>

It is up to the singer to bend the music in order to achieve an expressive verbal delivery, in order to restore to poetry, whether parodic or not, that which music robs of it.

Bacilly gallantly pays the following tribute to an anonymous aristocratic poetess whose parodies receive his approbation: “une Dame illustre par sa naissance, & encore davantage par mille belles qualitez” who has “trouvé le secret d’accommoder des Paroles aux Airs avec tant de justesse [...] [de] donner aux Airs des habits [...] magnifiques [...] riches [...] précieux, & non pas de misérables canevas.”<sup>111</sup> The magnificent, rich clothes

---

<sup>109</sup> Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 199: “Le [chanteur] doit avoir non seulement les mêmes connoissances pour bien executer: mais encore l’intelligence nécessaire pour sauver les défauts que le Compositeur, contraint par les regles de la Musique, n’aura pu éviter”; 206-207: “Ces Compositeurs qui n’ont que la science de la Musique en partage, reversent tellement l’ordre naturel de l’expression, dérangent si fort les tons nécessaires aux passions, qu’ils ne font aucun effet sur notre cœur, parce qu’ils portent à un intervalle déraisonnable les termes qui doivent nous toucher. Ils alterent tellement la quantité de leurs silables, qu’on ne les reconnoît plus.”

<sup>110</sup> Cited by Marco Horvat, “Note d’intention,” in *Concert: Parodies spirituelles au temps de Louis XIII*, 6.

<sup>111</sup> Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 117-118. It is unlikely that Bacilly is referring to Hilaire Dupuy, known as “Mlle Hilaire.” She was the daughter of Michel Dupuy, owner of the “cabaret *Bel Air*” that hosted well-known poets and musicians, and sister-in-law of Michel Lambert. She does not seem to fit the description provided by Bacilly of an illustrious aristocrat or even a poetess, for Mlle Hilaire distinguished herself at Court as a singer receiving the patronage of the Grande Mademoiselle. See also Scudéry, “Les Jeux

with which the anonymous poetess adorns instrumental music give the impression that the music was created for the text and not vice versa. The image of clothing evokes not only the textile connotation of the word “canevas” but the etymology of the word “text” itself (*textus* meaning “that which is woven” in Latin).

Salonniers enjoyed sight-reading secular parodies for each other the way they might have taken pleasure in putting on new clothes to see how they look and fit. The music, like the body, was expected to showcase the text just as much as the text, like fine new clothes, was expected to flatter the music. They were combined to create the unified effect that was song, and it was only through the performance of the parody that this union could be properly judged, first and foremost by the performer. Such a performance is represented in de Pure’s *La Prétieuse*, a novel which represents salon culture with a hint of satire. The hostess Eulalie seems indifferent to her guests’ enthusiastic response to her singing as she sounds out a parody composed by Gelasire, a young man who calls himself a poet.

In Book II of this work, Gelasire is the first person to arrive at Eulalie’s residence where she has invited her friends for a salon. Gelasire surprises Eulalie alone in the middle of a melancholy reverie. She explains that she has been ruminating over the demands of feminine virtue and women’s lack of “liberty” to love as they desired for fear of being labeled “coquettes.”<sup>112</sup> As other members of the circle begin to arrive, Gelasire

---

servant de préface à *Mathilde*,” 20-2: “il me semble que quand une femme qui a esté assez belle n’entend plus chanter les chansons qu’on a faites pour elle, et que l’admirable Lambert et la charmante Hilaire ne disent plus devant elle que des airs nouveaux, faits pour des beautés naissantes, elle n’y prend plus gueres de plaisir.” Is Bacilly referring then to Mme de la Suze or Mme Deshoulières? See Renate Kroll, “La chanson des femmes poètes au XVIIe siècle.”

<sup>112</sup> The character Eulalie represents the famous poetess and libertine Henriette de Coligny, comtesse de la Suze.

offers to recite for Eulalie a few verses relevant to her reverie. He explains that he composed this parody to the music of the “celebre Sarabande d’*Amarillis*.” Before beginning his recitation from memory, he warns Eulalie of the strangeness of his meter, which he quickly blames on the rhythmic demands of a melody composed to another poem:

Vous ne prendrez pas garde, s’il vous plaist, à la mesure des Vers, qui possible sera bizarre. Mais vous sçauvez qu’ils sont faits du temps de cette celebre Sarabande d’*Amarillis* dont le chant aussi bien que les paroles ont eu grande reputation. Je fus obligé par une Dame, qui n’a que trop d’esprit, de travailler sur ce chant & sur ce sujet; je fis donc quelque couplet, dont je ne vous promets que le premier et le dernier, qui sont les seuls restes dans ma malheureuse mémoire.<sup>113</sup>

Gelasire has only promised to recite two stanzas of his parody. The performance of his memory exceeds his expectations, for he spontaneously recites three stanzas and three refrains.

One presumes that the “celebre Sarabande” to which Gelasire refers really did exist and was known to de Pure’s readers. In fact, there did exist an anonymous air for salon performance, qualified as a *sarabande* with the incipit “*Amarillis, je renonce à vos charmes*.” Though the extant musical traces of this air date from the early eighteenth century,<sup>114</sup> its meter, rhyme scheme, and alternation between feminine and masculine rhymes bear an unmistakable resemblance to those of Gelasire’s poem. Such correspondences suggest that “*Amarillis, je renonce à vos charmes*” was composed and circulated well before its appearance in eighteenth-century sources:<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> De Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 2:224-225.

<sup>114</sup> According to the catalogue of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, this *air sérieux* appeared in two separate anthologies. The first was a manuscript entitled *Recueil d’airs sérieux et à boire de différent auteurs*. It is thought to have been created around 1700. The second was edited in 1711 by Christophe Ballard and entitled *Brunettes, ou Petits airs tendres, avec les doubles et la basse-continue, mêlés de chansons à danser*.

<sup>115</sup> The citation of this air in *La Prétieuse* implies that it predates the late 1650’s. However, it does not appear in any of Ballard’s song anthologies published in the first half of the seventeenth century. See

Original text: “Sarabande” <sup>116</sup>		syllable count	rhyme
Amarillis, je renonce à vos charmes,		10	a
Vous me traitez avec trop de rigueur,		10	b
Prés de Philis je verse moins de larmes,		10	a
<sup>4</sup> Un seul soûpir luy peut toucher le cœur		10	b
[refrain]			
Je ne cours pas toûjours à la plus adorable,		12	c
<sup>6</sup> La plus douce <sup>117</sup> est pour moy la plus aimable.		10	c
<i>Second couplet</i>			
On dit par tout que vous êtes plus belle, <sup>118</sup>		10	d
Que vôtre esprit est au dessus du sien,		10	e
Mais au moment que je brûlay pour elle,		10	d
<sup>10</sup> Son feu parût, il égala le mien <sup>119</sup>		10	e
[refrain]			
Est-il rien de plus doux que d’aimer qui nous aime?		12	f
<sup>12</sup> Voulez-vous être aimée? aimez de meme! <sup>120</sup>		10	f

---

Anne-Madeleine Goulet, *Paroles de musique, 1658-1694: catalogue des "Livres d'airs de différents auteurs" publiés chez Ballard* (Wavre: Mardaga, 2007) and Laurent Guillo, *Pierre I Ballard et Robert III Ballard. Imprimeurs du roy pour la muisque (1599-1673)*, 2 vols. (Sprimont, Belium: Mardaga, 2003). Bénigne de Bacilly includes in his *Recueil des plus vers qui ont esté mis en chant* (Paris: Sercy, 1661) the text of an anonymous *sarabande* which is virtually identical to the text appearing in the *Brunettes, ou Petits airs tendres*. Bacilly’s transcription contains three stanzas, as in Gelasire’s parody, whereas the eighteenth-century version only features two. Guillo’s index includes several other airs with the incipit “Amarillis...” However, they do not seem to have inspired Gelasire’s parody; either they do not contain successive decasyllabic verses, or they do not feature feminine and masculine rhymes in alternation.

<sup>116</sup> This text is as it appears in *Brunettes, ou Petits airs tendres*.

<sup>117</sup> Bacilly’s version of the text reads: “La facile est pour moy la plus aimable.” The eighteenth-century version substitutes “plus douce” for “facile,” undoubtedly considered too libertine a term by the editor Christophe Ballard.

<sup>118</sup> Bacilly: “Je suis d’accord que vous estes plus belle”

<sup>119</sup> Bacilly: “Son feu parut aussi-tost que le mien”

<sup>120</sup> Bacilly’s refrain: “N’est-il pas naturel d’aimer ce qui nous aime? / Pour moy j’en useray toûjours de même.” Bacilly’s third verse and refrain read as follows:

Quand vous croyez simplement qu’on vous aime,  
 Vous ignorez le pouvoir de vous coups;  
 L’on ne sçauroit sans un peril extreme  
 Vous voir souvent, & se plaïre avec vous;  
 De la bonne amitié sçachez que d’ordinaire  
 L’on n’a jusqu’à l’amour qu’un pas à faire.

Gelasire's "Chanson sur l'Air de la Sarabande d'Amarillis" <sup>121</sup>			syllable count	rhyme
	Jeune beauté qui blasmez les coquetes,		10	a
	Trêve d'aigreur & laissez-les en paix;		10	b
	Sçavez-vous bien le tort que vous vous faites,		10	a
4	Et croyez-vous de ne l'estre jamais?		10	b
[refrain]				
	Il faut le devenir à moins que d'estre laide,		12	c
6	Estre un objet d'amour ou le remede		10	c
[2 <sup>nd</sup> stanza]				
	Vous condamnez une chose receuë,		10	d
	Un ancien droit de raison & d'amour,		10	e
	L'antiquité si vous l'aviez bien sceuë		10	d
10	Arresteroit vostre chagrin tout cour [ <i>sic.</i> ];		10	e
[refrain]				
	Vous n'y verrez mourir qu'une seule Lucrece,		12	f
12	Encor <sup>122</sup> moins par vertu que par finesse.		10	f
[3 <sup>rd</sup> stanza]				
	Son sang ne fut qu'une couleur de gloire		10	g
	Qu'elle versa sur son libre desir,		10	h
	Pour nous duper & pour nous faire croire		10	g
16	Qu'elle n'estoit pas morte de plaisir;		10	h
[refrain]				
	Ce beau coup ne hata que d'un moment sa vie,		12	i
18	Qu'aussi bien le plaisir auroit ravie.		10	i

In Figure 2, I have transcribed into modern notation<sup>123</sup> the score of "Amarillis, je renonce à vos charmes" in g minor for solo voice and figured bass, contained in Christophe Ballard's 1711 edition of *Brunettes, ou Petits airs tendres, avec les doubles et la basse-continue, mêlés de chansons à danse*. The adjacent Figure 3 presents the score of Gelasire's parody which I have generated from this "Sarabande d'Amarillis." Like most airs composed for salon performance, this one is musically strophic. The prominence of

<sup>121</sup> De Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 2:225-226.

<sup>122</sup> Numerous seventeenth-century texts, both poetic and prosaic, present this spelling of the word "encore." Both spellings were acceptable and the choice between them offered poets more flexibility within the confines of meter.

<sup>123</sup> In the absence of modern editions, I present throughout the present study my modern transcriptions of scores published in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

“bizarre” decasyllabic meter supports the theory that these two poems were associated with the same music; such meter was unusual in salon airs.<sup>124</sup> In her dissertation entitled “The Sources for Christophe Ballard’s ‘Brunettes ou petits airs tendres’ and the tradition of seventeenth-century French song,” Elissa Poole differentiates between the airs appearing in Ballard’s 1711 edition and their original seventeenth-century versions, claiming that “text-inspired rhythms were often revised to stylized dance rhythms, phrase structure was standardized, meters and accentuation were altered to conform with barline stresses, and gavotte type songs were occasionally renotated in triple meter.”<sup>125</sup>

However, the air in question appeared in both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a *sarabande*, understood as a dance or dance-like piece in triple time with emphasis on the second beat (see mm. 5, 7, 11, 15 below). There was no need in Ballard’s 1711 edition to modify the rhythms, accents, and meter, for the original air was already a “stylized dance.” I therefore approach Ballard’s edition as a reliable transcription of the seventeenth-century *sarabande*.

---

<sup>124</sup> See Goulet, *Poésie, musique et sociabilité au XVIIe siècle*, 264. Her table presents the types of verse that most frequently appear in the *Livres d’airs de différents auteurs* published by Ballard between 1658 and 1694.

<sup>125</sup> Elissa Poole, “The Sources for Christophe Ballard’s ‘Brunettes ou petits airs tendres’ and the tradition of seventeenth-century French song,” PhD diss., University of Victoria, 1984. My citation is taken from Poole’s abstract available online through the database ProQuest Digital Dissertations (UMI). An online version of this dissertation is unavailable.

Sarabande d'Amarillis  
from *Brunettes, ou Petits airs tendres...* (1711)

A - ma - ri - lis, je re nonce à vos char - mes,  
Près de Phi - lis, je ver - se moins de lar - mes,  
On dit par tout que vous ét - es plus be - lle,  
Mais au mo - ment que je brù - lay pour e - lle,

vous me trai - tez av - ec trop de ri - gueur, je ne cours pas tou - jours  
un seul soup - ir luy peut tou - cher le coeur  
Que votre es - prit est au de - ssus du sien, Est - il rien de plus doux  
Son feu pa - rût, il é - ga - la au mien.

à la plus a - do - ra - ble, La plus douce est pour moy la plus ai - ma - ble.  
que d'ai - mer qui nous ai - me? Vou - lez - vous être ai - mée? Ai - mez de - mê - me.

Figure 2

Chanson sur l'Air de la Sarabande d'Amarillis  
from *La Prétieuse* (1656-1658)

Jeu - ne beau - té les co - que - les,  
Sça - vez - vous bien le tor - des,  
Vous con - dam - nez u - ne se - dan - ce,  
L'an - ti - qui - té si vous l'a - vriez bien sceu - é

Tré - ve d'ai - gueur et lai - ssez - les en paix; Il faut le de - ve - nir  
Et croy - ez - vous de ne l'es - tre jam - ais? Vous n'y ver - rez mou - rir  
Un an - cien droit de rai - son et d'a - mour, Vous n'y ver - rez mou - rir  
Ar - rest - e - z - vous vos - tre cha - grin tout cour.

à moins que d'estre lai - de, Estre un ob - ject d'a - mour ou le re - me - de  
qu'u - ne seu - le Lu - cre - ce, En - cor moins par ver - tu que par fi - ne - sse.

Son sang ne fut qu'une couleur de gloire  
Qu'elle versa sur son libre desir,  
Pour nous duper & pour nous faire croire  
Qu'elle n'estoit pas morte de plaisir;  
Ce beau coup ne hata que d'un moment sa vie,  
Qu'aussi bien le plaisir auroit ravie.

Figure 3



Gelasire's text does not openly imitate or satirize the style and themes of the original. Nonetheless, an intertextual reading of his poem reveals that it is a playfully, subtly subversive interpretation of "Amarillis, je renonce à vos charmes." Both texts revolve around the same dilemma faced by women: to love or not to love. The original song presents a lover's decision to renounce the rigorous Amarillis in favor of the more amenable Philis. Gelasire's song defends women who allow themselves to love, liberated from the need to appear virtuous and austere. The tone and style, however, clearly differ between the original text and Gelasire's parody. Just as the lover in "Amarillis, je renonce à vos charmes" distinguishes between Philis's warm heart and Amarillis's sharp mind, the original text is sentimental in style, while Gelasire's parody is more playful and witty. This parody is "libertine" in the seventeenth-century sense of the word, that is, savant and audacious. Alluding to the historical figure of Lucretia, Gelasire's text is an apology of "free love" that reduces feminine *pudeur* to mere superficiality: this virtue is either upheld as vain appearance masking a woman's lustful desires, or it is necessitated by her physical ugliness repelling all potential lovers. The figure of Amarillis in the first text corresponds with that of Lucretia in the second, whom Gelasire accuses of hypocrisy and secret pleasure in her rape by Sextus Tarquinius; similarly, the figure of Philis in the first text corresponds with the coquettes in the second. Both poems advocate love over austerity, though they use different rhetorical approaches.

Upon listening to Gelasire's recitation, Eulalie exclaims, "J'aime ces Vers." She seems to like them for their pleasingly libertine, and therefore liberating, quality: "je vous promets que non seulement je les trouve bons, mais encore j'y trouve quelque chose qui

me plaist.”<sup>126</sup> Still, the literary merits of Gelasire’s poetry leave Eulalie hungry. She demands that he sing his poetry: “J’aime ces Vers, s’écria Eulalie, mais comme ils ne sont faits que pour estre chantez, de grace, ne les dites jamais sans les chanter, afin de leur donner toute leur force, & de les debiter pour leur juste valeur.”<sup>127</sup> Gelasire is discouraged by Eulalie’s demand and responds despondently, “Je vois bien que vous ne les approuvez pas, puis qu’il vous faut du ragoust, C’est un mauvais signe & bien dangereux, quand on loüe la beauté par la bonté, & les Vers par le chant.” A “ragoust” is literally a seasoning, sauce, or stew used to excite the appetite, oftentimes concealing the quality of the food it blankets. Gelasire worries that the music would overshadow his poetry.

A similar gastronomical image is evoked in the salon conversation between the chevalier, countess, and count represented in Jean-Louis Le Cerf de La Viéville’s *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise*. The chevalier maintains that the overly elaborate and ornate style of singing among Italians is similar to “un homme qui ne vous feroit manger que des daubes, des patisseries, des ragouts, des confitures, & qui ne vous feroit boire que des Vins muscats, de l’Eau de Cete & du Pitrepite” while the relatively simple, “natural” manner of singing among the French is likened to one who serves “que du Vin de Tonnerre ou de Silleri, des potages excellens [...] de la viande blanche, admirable chacune en son genre, peu d’entremets, des plus beaux fruits & des compotes.”<sup>128</sup> According to the chevalier’s artistic taste, music is best

---

<sup>126</sup> De Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 2:227.

<sup>127</sup> De Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 2:226-227.

<sup>128</sup> Le Cerf de La Viéville, *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise*, 22-23.

when simple and unornamented, like a properly cooked slab of meat without sauce obscuring its fundamental qualities. Whereas the chevalier proposes that the musical relationship in song between ornamentation and melody is analogous to that between sauce and meat, Gelasire in *La Précieuse* uses the same image to represent the relationship between music and text in song. He considers music to be the accessory or mere seasoning of the text. Though the music of the *sarabande* provided Gelasire with the impetus and structure to compose his verses, he believes that they can do without the music that conditioned their existence. When Eulalie insists that his verses be sung, Gelasire fears that the music would threaten to obscure the value of his poetry, or worse, that without the sauce of the *sarabande*, his verbal meat is tasteless. Is Eulalie's insistence on singing a polite way of expressing her dissatisfaction with Gelasire's poetry?

If Eulalie wants Gelasire's verses to be sung, and not merely recited, it is not necessarily because she views them as "Paroles oyseuses." She seems to share the opinion of the writer Charles Sorel, who in *De la connoissance des bons livres* states:

Il faut considerer aussi que les Vers sont comme l'esprit du Chant, en quoy ils servent beaucoup, puisqu'il n'y a rime de si propre pour exprimer les diverses affections des Hommes, & pour calmer ou adoucir les plus violentes agitations de l'ame, que peut estre le Chant, quand il est accompagné des termes de la Poësie, [...] sans eux [*sic.*] les meilleurs Vers n'ont ny force ny grace.<sup>129</sup>

Not only verses composed specifically for musical setting, but any poetry, even the best poetry, gain in affective expressivity, communicative force, and aesthetic grace from being put to music. Neither music nor poetry alone can achieve so strong an effect. In order to convince Gelasire of her more generous motivations, Eulalie immediately offers

---

<sup>129</sup> Sorel, *De la connoissance des bons livres*, 192.

to sing Gelasire's words herself.<sup>130</sup> Melanire, who had arrived with Gelasire and who has been listening to the exchange between Gelasire and Eulalie, seconds this proposal. She insists that Gelasire's poetry would not be obscured by the melody, but find new harmonies through Eulalie's singing voice: "c'est parler par sa bouche, que de la laisser chanter, & il n' y a point de temps à perdre si nous voulons jouïr du bien qu'elle nous a fait espérer, & si vous desirez me donner le plaisir d'entendre par une mesme organe, et d'une mesme voix l'ouvrage de tous deux."<sup>131</sup> Gelasire is appeased and honored by this courteous gesture coming from his distinguished hostess, as would be any young, uncertain poet trying to gain favor in salon society. He interprets her willingness to lend her own voice to his poetry as sufficient proof of her esteem for it.

Eulalie thus trades places with Gelasire, becoming the performer and he the silent listener. Still, she does not seem to care that Gelasire, Melanire, and the other arriving guests are all attentively listening to her beautiful voice. She clearly states her purpose for singing Gelasire's verses before she begins: "je veux les chanter moy-mesme, & voir s'ils sont justes à la Sarabande."<sup>132</sup> Eulalie is curious to see how the music treats the text and vice versa, verifiable only through the act of singing. She wants to judge the formal aspects of Gelasire's parody that were not apparent in his spoken recitation, namely the correspondence between textual accentuation, prosody, and syntax and musical accentuation, rhythm, and phrasing. In both the original air and Gelasire's parody, the

---

<sup>130</sup> It is difficult to determine whether Eulalie's ability to spontaneously sing Gelasire's entire poem after having heard it recited only once may be due to a slight glitch in de Pure's literary realism, or to a strong passion for poetry among salonniers, facilitating its memorization.

<sup>131</sup> De Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 2:229.

<sup>132</sup> De Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 2:228.

music generally reinforces the inherent rhythms and accents of the text.<sup>133</sup> Whether or not and how Eulalie adjusts the rhythm and accentuation of the *sarabande* in order to accommodate the inherent prosody of Gelasire's text, as Grimarest and Jean l'Evangéliste d'Arras recommend, seems to be a matter of personal taste. For example, she might or might not judge the melody in m. 7 to awkwardly accent the word "laissez-les en paix" (l. 2). Presumably, Eulalie is not only testing the formal union between the new text and old music, but making spontaneous edits if and when she judges that the music and the poetry do not agree with each other.

Furthermore, Eulalie uses the act of singing to judge Gelasire's composition according to what the musicologist Georgie Durosoir terms "l'étape esthétique": the more subtle correspondence between sound, sense and affect, between textual eloquence and musical expression.<sup>134</sup> Do Gelasire's verses retain their poetic "harmony" when fitted upon this *sarabande*? Without appearing to follow strictly musical dictates, Gelasire does a fine job positioning the vivid, evocative nouns "beauté," "coquetes," "aigreur," "paix," "remède," "amour," "antiquité," "finesse," "gloire," "desir," "plaisir," the proper name "Lucrece," the colorful adjectives "laide" and "ravie," and the forceful words "condamnez," "droit," "duper," and "jamais," precisely where they call for expressive ornamentation (marked with a small cross) in the melody. One cannot help but admire the ironic prolongation of the word "moment" signifying brevity (l. 17). Furthermore, by placing the purely syntactical words "ou," "que," "auroit" on the triplet at the beginning of m. 14, Gelasire systematically respects the effect of suspense assigned to that musical

---

<sup>133</sup> The same can be said for Bacilly's version of this *sarabande*.

<sup>134</sup> Durosoir, "Timbre et geste créateur," 31.

figure in this song. It serves to defer the conclusion of each refrain, more striking in the parodic text than in the original: “un objet d’amour ou le remede” (l. 6) reveals the meaning of the mysterious direct objet pronoun “le” in ll. 4 and 5; “Encor moins par vertu que par finesse” (l. 12) provocatively questions the honor of Lucretia; this provocation turns into audaciousness in the final line “Qu’aussi bien le plaisir auroit ravie.”

Beyond these isolated features, can the same music and its affects be appropriate for both a sentimental declaration and a libertine provocation, the rhetorical gestures of which do not coincide? Eulalie’s willingness to lend her own voice to this poetico-musical experiment implies that she considers the affective character of music to be polysemic. It is evocative of and applicable to different images, sentiments, and ideas between one text and another. In a word, the same person can fit nicely into different clothes. Eulalie hopes that Gelasire’s parody will not only do justice to a beloved melody, but will instill it with new life and meaning by playfully subverting the original text.

Eulalie’s singing thus seems to be motivated by her curiosity to discover what the union between well known music and an unknown text might yield, rather than by a desire to display her voice for the salon circle. Indeed, the circle completely forms only after she begins singing. Eulalie’s lack of affectation is accentuated by the fact that her performance is framed by discourses which, on the contrary, reek of affectation. After she has proposed to sing Gelasire’s poem, he offers the following loquacious compliment: “Ce sera donc à moy à juger de mes Vers à mon tour, & par avance je puis vous assurer que je les trouve meilleurs qu’ils n’estoient. Si vous voulez vous engager à

chanter tous ceux que je feray, je ne voudrais jamais faire autre chose que des Vers, & me trouverois encor bien-heureux de trouver une fin si belle de mon travail...”<sup>135</sup> Gelasire’s waxing poetic is cut short by Melanire who asks him to stop talking so that Eulalie can sing. During this interjection, however, Melanire also takes the opportunity to compliment Eulalie even more longwindedly than Gelasire! While Eulalie unassumingly proceeds to sing, Gelasire is already planning his next move:

Il crût que c’estoit bien le moins qu’il devoit à la grace que cette belle personne luy avoit faite, & au divertissement qu’il en avoit recue d’en faire un espece d’aveu public, & de faire éclater son admiration devant toute l’assemblée. Si-tost que le monde fut arrivé, ou qu’il en fut assez arrivé, pour donner un peu de bruit à son témoignage, il ouvrit la Conversation par les éloges d’Eulalie, & par la loüange de sa belle voix.

After Eulalie’s brief song, Gelasire plans to deliver his compliment as a dazzling oratorical performance in itself. His ambition and affectation are evident. He may derive much pleasure from Eulalie’s singing, but his praise is really intended to demonstrate how sensitive and eloquent a listener he is. To Gelasire’s dismay, his carefully prepared oration is overshadowed by the circle’s spontaneous compliments on Eulalie’s voice: “Mais il trouva par tout des Echos, qui encherissant sur son approbation, se mettoient en estat d’opprimer la modestie de cette belle personne.”<sup>136</sup> De Pure seems to ridicule this game of one-upmanship between each person’s compliment, exposing the vanity and affectation of those who praise others in order to distinguish themselves. In contrast, Eulalie’s attitude toward her singing performance is unaffected, a rarity in this novel which more often than not derides the affectation of salonnières when they perform for each other. The character Eulalie escapes de Pure’s censure by concentrating not on her

---

<sup>135</sup> De Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 2:227.

<sup>136</sup> De Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 2:231.

own performance or the beauty of her voice, which has “dequoy ravir les plus délicats,” but on the parody brought to light through that voice.

Seventeenth-century French salon culture thrived on the free play between collective conversation and artistic performances by individuals. However, such performances risked dishonoring the performers when their effort was interpreted as affectation, a vice commonly attributed to professional performers. Castiglione recommends that aristocratic performers seem to accord little importance to the art they practice. This recommendation reflects his uneasiness vis-à-vis the pursuit of beauty through the practice of art; pure pleasure is vain if not coupled with the pursuit of wisdom leading to goodness. Though this moral instrumentation of pleasure was not typical of seventeenth-century salon culture, the spectacle of one’s pleasure did constitute a gesture of generosity. Affectation implied excessive attention to one’s own performance, rather than the work being performed, and the arrogant desire to receive admiration from others. In contrast, when they seemed to enjoy the practice or discovery of art, salonnières demonstrated their happiness and ease in the social circle invited to take part in their pleasure. The sources studied in this chapter clearly distinguish between genuine pleasure and affectation in salon performance, as if to suggest that the transmission of pleasure from the performer to the audience would be impossible if the performer were only faking, or affecting, this pleasure. Whereas in a professional situation, the performer’s pleasure was thought to be contingent on that of the audience, in a salon situation, the audience’s pleasure was conditioned by that of the performer. Seventeenth-century salon culture, therefore, was not only about the careful crafting of appearances; it



also promoted the pure joy of bringing art to life. By shifting their focus from the performance of art to the art being performed, salonnières demonstrated that performance had become pleasurable second nature, rather than an end in itself requiring effort and concentration. This shift of attention was integral to certain artistic practices of the salon, namely vocalized literary and musical reading. Whether the work was being performed for the first time or renewed through the reader's interpretation, a salon reading ideally entailed an exciting, collective discovery as pleasurable to the reader as to the listeners. The performer was a discerning subject assessing the merit of the text, as if unaware of being an object of scrutiny.

## **2. Between Artistic Freedom and Social Constraint**

As I have shown in the preceding chapter, affectation was universally decried as socially and aesthetically offensive in a salon setting. The freedom to enjoy oneself as an aristocratic performer was cultivated in order to offset affectation. However, it would be erroneous to equate salon performance with pure freedom, just as it would be erroneous to presume that it was always socially restricted. Salonnières often deliberated between freedom of expression and polite self-constraint; sometimes their performances entailed both. Physical comedy, the art of ridicule through impersonation, and the representation of passion best illustrate this ambiguity in aristocratic comportment. These common artistic practices entailed social risks. The performance of physical comedy could threaten one's sense of dignity; a malicious impersonation of another could reveal an ugliness in the performer, both physical and moral; and the manifestation of passion in a performance by a woman could endanger her honorable image of modesty. Moreover, just as affectation was commonly associated with professional performance artists, from whom salonnières sought social distinction, so were the vices of vulgarity, malice, and immodesty. There was no single, generally accepted manner of approaching these artistic performances and their corresponding social risks in the salon. They necessitated a personal choice or fine balance between freedom and self-restraint in order to demonstrate one's artistic talent and skill without detriment to one's sense of dignity, generosity, and modesty. The present chapter will focus on physical comedy, the art of impersonation, and the representation of passion in order to reveal these choices and balances between artistic freedom and social constraint. My study will also interrogate

the differences in performance strategy between women and men, revealing differences in their sense of social identity.

### ***Physical Humor in the Salon***

The seventeenth-century salon projected an image of refinement and conviviality, which different authors named differently: “urbanité” for Guez de Balzac,<sup>1</sup> “eutrapélie” for Saint François de Sales,<sup>2</sup> “honnêteté” for Méré, “tendresse” or “air galant” for Scudéry. What was the status of humor in this relaxed yet refined setting? Pointed mockery was considered harmful to the ties of friendship binding the salon circle. Certain comical performances, however, could be enjoyed collectively and at the expense of no one. Charles de Sévigné’s hilarious readings of Rabelais, mentioned in my first chapter, suggest that grotesque performances were not necessarily banned from refined salon culture. Still, the representation of the grotesque differed between a voiced reading and an acting performance involving the entire body. It would seem that physical humor was incompatible with the corporeal elegance and grace normally expected in salon interaction. Surprisingly though, examples of buffoonery in salon performance are cited

---

<sup>1</sup> See Guez de Balzac, “Suite d’un entretien de vive voix, ou de la conversation des Romains.” He uses the ancient Roman concept of *urbanitas* to encompass a number of meanings related to seventeenth-century salon sociability, from a person’s general air (“un certain air du grand Monde et une couleur et teinture de la Cour, qui ne marque pas seulement les paroles et les opinions mais aussi le ton de la voix et les mouvements du corps”), to a more mysterious quality resembling Méré’s “agrément” (“une impression encore moins perceptible, qui n’est reconnaissable que par hasard, qui n’a rien qui ne soit noble et relevé, et rien qui paraisse ou étudié ou appris, qui se sent et ne se voit pas, et inspire un génie secret que l’on perd en le cherchant”; see also note 39 in the present chapter), to simply “la Science de la Conversation,” to the art of joking tastefully (“une adresse à toucher l’esprit par je ne sçay quoy de piquant, mais dont la piqueur est agréable à celui qui la reçoit”).

<sup>2</sup> François de Sales, *Introduction à la Vie Dévote*, 207: “Mais quant aux jeux de paroles qui se font des uns aux autres avec une modeste gaieté et joyeuseté, ils appartiennent à la vertu nommée eutrapélie par les Grecs, que nous pouvons appeler bonne conversation; et par iceux on prend une honnête et amiable récréation sur les occasions frivoles que les imperfections humaines fournissent. Il se faut garder seulement de passer de cette honnête joyeuseté à la moquerie. Or, la moquerie provoque à rire par mépris et contemnement du prochain; mais la gaieté et gausserie provoque à rire par une simple liberté, confiance et familière franchise.”

in multiple seventeenth-century sources. The current section seeks to understand the salonnier's occasional willingness to embody a ridiculous character, to temporarily abandon the constraints of social propriety for the sake of entertainment, thus stretching the limits of "l'honnête joyeuseté."

Charles Sorel's libertine style stretches these limits to the point where it is difficult to assess the realism of his salon portrayals. This prolific writer produced a wide variety of texts: scientific, medical, and philosophical treatises, historical studies, literary criticisms, satirical writings, novels, plays, and gallant poetry. He also catalogued and described in detail hundreds of games and pastimes among salonnières. Sorel's representation of playfulness in salon culture is itself playful and of questionable realism. His games range from the mischievous to the bawdy. Among the well-mannered games described in *Les Recréations galantes* can be found more dubious games hesitating between the author's subversive imagination and real salon practice. One fortune-telling game, for example, requires players to speak of each other in the following terms: "Ta femme sera impudique"; "Ton mary débauchera toutes tes servantes"; "Elle a esté pucelle jusqu'à douze ans"; "Ton mary te battera."<sup>3</sup> Sorel also proposes in *Les Recréations galantes* a salon game entitled the "Jeu des Complimens ou Flatteries," in which buffoonery is pushed to the extreme. Each player is invited to spontaneously pay a compliment to another, making sure to avoid repetition between compliments. After presenting the general rules, Sorel suggests the following variations:

Pour rendre le Jeu plus mignard, l'on choisit aussi chacun des paroles enfantines que l'on prononce en begayant, & l'on trouve qu'il y a beaucoup de plaisir quand l'un tasche de contrefaire celle d'un autre, d'autant que chacun ne peut pas reussir à cela. L'on peut choisir aussi des langages de Provinces diverses, comme du Gascon, du Normand, du Picard, & du Champenois, &

---

<sup>3</sup> Sorel, *Les Recréations galantes*, 22-24.

en contrefaire l'accent, y adjoustant mesme de l'Italien & de l'Espagnol; ou bien il faut prendre chacun des langages de bouffon, comme de Gautier-Garguille; de Gros Guillaume, de Jodelet, & de Guillot-Corju, Ceux qui les choisiront pour eux, seront ceux qui sçauront desja bien les contrefaire avec les façons de parler qui leur sont les plus communes, au lieu que les autres qui ne pourront pas accommoder leurs voix si facilement à divers tons, rendront le Jeu extrêmement facétieux.<sup>4</sup>

Sorel encourages salonniers to modify their voice, facial expression, and action in order to imitate provincial and foreign mannerisms or “des langages de bouffon.” His salon game is presented as a “safety zone” where experimentation can take place and where silly, unflattering behavior is not socially penalized. On the other hand, when the salonniers in Sorel's novel *Le Berger extravagant* decide to improvise in a grotesque manner the abduction of Proserpina by Pluto, propriety excuses the ladies from participating in that play.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps Sorel is just fantasizing through the “Jeu des Complimens ou Flatteries;” he is aspiring toward a mode of interaction where lasting judgment of one's interlocutors is suspended in the name of genuine fun and ephemeral silliness. Or perhaps Sorel is toying with the “game,” that is, the “gap” that exists between his literary representations and real salon practice.

Let us therefore turn to real practice in order to better appreciate the irony and playfulness of Sorel's fictions. In the chapter “De la Déclamation” of his *Traité du récitatif*, Jean Léonor Le Gallois de Grimarest strongly discourages salonniers from performing “du comique burlesque, ou risible.” He claims that “la voix comique” of an old man, a blowhard, a drunkard, or a country bumpkin is difficult to imitate accurately: “Il n'y a presque personne qui puisse parvenir en general à cette imitation; & c'est

---

<sup>4</sup> Sorel, *Les Recréations galantes*, 60.

<sup>5</sup> Sorel, *Le Berger extravagant*, 351: “Les bergeres ne furent point mises au nombre des personnages qui paroistroient sur le theatre, pource que Clarimond avoit delibéré que l'on ne feroit rien que de grotesque, et qu'il ne faloit pas y mesler les dames.”

beaucoup qu'un Acteur puisse en attraper un ou deux."<sup>6</sup> For Grimarest, the representation of a ridiculous character through outlandish inflection, pronunciation, and gesture is risky for the salonnier, precisely because such a performance is too difficult to carry out successfully. Tragedy and serious comedy, which call for a more noble and dignified style of acting, present less of a risk. According to Grimarest, disgrace results not from the burlesque itself, but from a mediocre performance of it:

Ces remarques sur le Comique de la voix ne conviennent qu'à ceux qui en ont une capable d'entrer dans le ridicule de la prononciation. Je sais que bien des gens, qui se donnent le plaisir de la Déclamation, s'imaginent avoir cette disposition: mais outre qu'il est difficile d'atteindre la perfection du recit comique; c'est que l'on se donne un ridicule dans le monde de le tenter sans succès: Ainsi je conseille à tous ceux qui ont la passion de la déclamation, de s'en tenir au sérieux, qui est beaucoup plus aisé à reciter que le comique.<sup>7</sup>

One must keep in mind that Grimarest is also a biographer of Molière, and that he has Molière in mind when he claims that "le comique burlesque, ou risible" is more difficult to perform than more "noble" theatrical genres. Grimarest's stance calls to mind Dorante's apology of comedy in *La Critique de l'École des femmes* (vi):

Car enfin, je trouve qu'il est bien plus aisé de se guinder sur de grands sentiments, de braver en vers la Fortune, accuser les Destins, et dire des injures aux Dieux, que d'entrer comme il faut dans le ridicule des hommes, et de rendre agréablement sur le théâtre des défauts de tout le monde. Lorsque vous peignez des héros, vous faites ce que vous voulez [...] vous n'avez qu'à suivre les traits d'une imagination qui se donne l'essor, et qui souvent laisse le vrai pour attraper le merveilleux. Mais lorsque vous peignez les hommes, il faut peindre d'après nature. On veut que ces portraits ressemblent; et vous n'avez rien fait, si vous n'y faites reconnaître les gens de votre siècle. En un mot, dans les pièces sérieuses, il suffit, pour n'être point blâmé, de dire des choses qui soient de bon sens et bien écrites; mais ce n'est pas assez dans les autres, il y faut plaisanter; et c'est une étrange entreprise que celle de faire rire les honnêtes gens.

Molière's comedy strives to represent reality in a "recognizable" manner, and to poke fun at this reality in a pleasant manner ("rendre agréablement sur le théâtre des défauts de tout le monde [...] il y faut plaisanter"). It is intended to appeal not only to the masses,

---

<sup>6</sup> Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 179.

<sup>7</sup> Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 182-183.

but to “les honnêtes gens” as well.<sup>8</sup> As Dorante implores in *La Critique de l'École des Femmes* (vi): “Laissons-nous aller de bonne foi aux choses qui nous prennent par les entrailles, et ne cherchons point de raisonnements pour nous empêcher d’avoir du plaisir.” Grimarest agrees that the refinement of salon culture does not preclude “le comique burlesque, ou risible” by and for “les honnêtes gens.” However, the difficulty for salonniers in this type of performance lies in their ability and courage to abandon their customary grace, moderation, and self-constraint in order to freely “enter” into the ridiculousness of their representation: “je conseille à tout Acteur de ne représenter aucun de ces personnages, s’il n’entre entièrement dans son caractère.”<sup>9</sup> Salonniers wary of their social image might be tempted to restrain themselves when undertaking a comic performance. However, it is this self-constraint that dooms their performance and with it, ironically, their social image. If one hesitates in representing one’s character “entièrement,” the performance suffers and the performer (not the character) becomes “risible”: “se donne[r] le plaisir de la Déclamation” becomes “se donne[r] un ridicule dans le monde de le tenter sans succès.” Still, Grimarest offers a list of stereotypical characters and their corresponding traits so that any salonniers wanting to attempt this type of performance can render their imitations distinct and “recognizable.” Though both Molière and Grimarest insist on mimetic accuracy in comedy, their manners of contrasting comedy and tragedy are dissimilar. Whereas Molière maintains that tragedy reflects only the poet’s imagination and is therefore less connected to reality than comedy, Grimarest suggests that the noble style of acting in tragedy is more consistent

---

<sup>8</sup> See Larry Norman, *The public mirror* for a thorough study of Molière’s strategy to dissociate comedy from pure buffoonery, transforming it into an enlightening and light-hearted form of entertainment.

<sup>9</sup> Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 180.

with the dignity and refinement of salon culture. Of course, the demonstrative art of tragic declamation was nothing like the subtle art of salon sociability. Nonetheless, Grimarest considers serious declamation to be “easier” for the typical salonnier because it does not require such a dramatic and courageous transformation of character. Uninhibited physical humor can thus serve the aristocratic performer’s social image by reflecting talent, wit, and noble audacity.

Certain situations facilitated this dramatic transformation from dignity to buffoonery in the salon: the period of Carnival, notably, provided such a context. Two letters written by the author Jean Chapelain to the marquis de Montauzier in December 1638 detail the preparations for a *commedia dell’arte* performance in the salon of the marquise de Rambouillet.<sup>10</sup> The cast features no professional actors, but rather Chapelain, Montauzier, the famous grammarian Claude Favre de Vaugelas, the poet Jean Ogier de Gombaud, a few noble officers, and other dignified salonniers in the marquise’s Chambre bleue. Several roles call for buffoonery: two goofy valets, two hapless beggars (*i stracciuni* played by Vaugelas and Gombaud), and the *Barbagrigia hampatore*, a bearded fellow with a pot belly (*una pancia onnipotente*). Because Monsieur Neuf-Germain has the beard but lacks the paunch, it is decided that his coat will be stuffed with a pillow for the desired effect. This character in particular evokes the Bakhtinian concept of the grotesque in a carnivalesque context: his excessively long beard and big belly symbolize the paradoxical union between decrepitude and fertility, death and rebirth. The carnivalesque practice of cross-dressing also comes into play as the dashing adolescent Jean de Montreuil, future secrétaire des commandements of the prince de

---

<sup>10</sup> Chapelain, “Lettre CCXXXV. à M. le Marquis de Montauzier,” 339-341.



Conti and member of the Académie française, is assigned one of the female roles. As for the other one, Chapelain's account becomes playfully ambiguous: "Et, parce que la comédie est italienne et que nous n'avons point de femmes, ny qui prononcent bien cette langue, nous avons pensé de despescher en Piedmont en la cour de Madame Reale, sous le crédit de Mr de marquis de Pisani [son of the marquise de Rambouillet], pour faire faire l'autre à la contesse ou à quelque autre veuve mariée de ce país là." Not only is Rambouillet's salon peopled by men and women who speak Italian fluently, the marquise was born and raised in Rome. Chapelain's ironic claim to the contrary is perhaps an oblique reference to the unwillingness of the marquise and other ladies to participate in staged buffoonery. The art of comedy in the salon thus seems to have imposed the radical choice between an unbridled performance or no performance at all. Unwilling to temporarily forsake dignity and polite self-constraint for the sake of entertainment, the ladies in the *Chambre bleue* deem it more judicious to refrain from such a performance than to undertake it half-heartedly and hesitatingly, therefore awkwardly and unbecomingly. The gentlemen have fun acting like buffoons, but they take their comedy seriously: rehearsals take place regularly prior to the performance and the marquise supervises the construction of a temporary theater inside her spacious drawing room for the occasion. The performers thus defy the principles of moderation and propriety that usually govern salon sociability, taking advantage of the Carnival season to temporally transform into comical Italian stock characters. It is this ephemeral cultural context, a pretext for uninhibited fun with impunity, that liberates the salonniers participating in the comedy. At the end of the performance and Carnival season, the masks, props, and

pillow are all but forgotten: no reference to this performance is made in Chapelain's subsequent letters.

As the "honneste" protagonist Lysis explains to his companion Carmelin in Sorel's novel *Le Berger extravagant*, "il y a de la gloire à faire le bouffon de bonne grace, et si tu le pouvois faire, ta bouffonnerie seroit alors honorable."<sup>11</sup> Salonnières honored themselves when their buffoonery was unreserved and entertaining. At the same time, it was important to prevent one's temporary antics from tainting one's general social image, to present oneself as a salonnier wearing the mask of a buffoon and not vice versa. A comic performance recounted in the 1673 edition of *Le Mercure galant* treads this fine line between "*faire le bouffon de bonne grace*" and *être bouffon disgracieux*. Following the death of Molière, a gentleman by the name of Cleante tells his hostess that he has composed a sermon in the playwright's honor and offers to deliver it in front of her distinguished guests. An *oraison funèbre* in the manner of Bossuet is an ironic tribute to Molière who was buried secretly at night without a religious service because he had not renounced his theatrical profession before God.<sup>12</sup> A special chair, referred to as "une chaise," has already been installed in her home for Molière himself who had promised to come perform scenes from *Le Malade imaginaire*. The term *chaise* is comically ambiguous in the oratorical and dramatic context of Cleante's performance. It is synonymous with *chaire* referring to the formal elevated seat from which orators,

---

<sup>11</sup> Sorel, *Le Berger extravagant*, 320.

<sup>12</sup> See Sabine Chaouche, *La philosophie de l'acteur*, 34.

professors, and priests delivered their speeches and sermons.<sup>13</sup> Evoking such figures, Cleante dons a black robe in order to perform his funeral sermon. However, when he solemnly takes his seat on the *chaise*, his salon audience bursts into laughter. This reaction is undoubtedly due to the fact that the *chaise* is not actually a *chaire* but rather a *chaise percée*, or toilet seat, installed for Molière's performance as the enema-ridden Argan in *Le Malade imaginaire*. The incongruity between the seriousness of the sermon form and the immodest display of the toilet seat sets the tone for an amusing, irreverent performance combining elegant oration and physical humor.

Cleante's tribute to Molière is qualified as a tasteful type of "burlesque" defined in the introduction to the first volume of the *Recueil de pieces en prose, les plus agreables de ce temps*:

Il ne faut pas entendre cecy d'un Burlesque impertinent, dont la perfection soit établie à entasser des niaiseries les unes sur les autres, en langage Barbare ou Pedantesque, ou en langage des Halles; mais de quelque autre stile plus raffiné, dont la gentillesse consiste en des aventures plaisantes qui conviennent au sujet, & en des pointes qui sont dans le sens autant que dans les paroles.<sup>14</sup>

Cléante's generous praise for Molière wavers between sincere admiration and playful teasing: "Combien a-t-il épargné de sang à toute la France, en faisant voir l'inutilité des frequentes Saignées?"<sup>15</sup> In keeping with Molière's sense of humor, Cleante's performance is a parody of eulogies and sermons in general. He exaggerates his sadness caused by Molière's demise, to the point of hilarity:

---

<sup>13</sup> *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 1st Edition (1694): "On appelle, *Chaire & Chaise*, mais plus ordinairement *Chaire*, Ce siege d'où les Predicateurs preschent, & d'où les Professeurs enseignent. *Le Predicateur, le Professeur estant en chaise, monter en chaire.*"

<sup>14</sup> "Aux Lecteurs" in *Recueil de pieces en prose, les plus agreables de ce temps. Composées par divers auteurs. Premiere partie* (Paris: Charles de Sercy, 1659): n.p.

<sup>15</sup> Donneau de Visé, *Le Mercure galant*, 1673/4, 299.

Je ne puis songer à ce trépas, sans faire éclater mes sanglots, Je voy bien toutefois que vous attendez autre chose de moy que des soupirs & des larmes; mais le moyen de s'empescher d'en répandre un torrent! Que dis-je un torrent! Ce n'est pas assez. Il en faut verser un Fleuve. Que dis-je un Fleuve! Ce seroit trop peu; & nos larmes devroient produire une autre Mer.<sup>16</sup>

Words frequently give way to bodily functions in this performance. After so much crying, Cleante encourages the members of his audience to cough, spit, and blow their noses harmoniously together.<sup>17</sup> On several occasions, he must interrupt his discourse, seized by a fit of crying performed in the manner of a buffoon. After enumerating the character types that Molière has represented, a lengthy list testing the strength of Cleante's memory, he confesses his need to quench his thirst and chugs some wine.

Toward the end of his speech, the orator transforms into a comic actor in imitation of Molière. Suddenly disappearing behind his seat, Cleante manipulates two marionettes representing Momus and Molière appearing to each side of it. He adeptly disguises his voice in order to perform a dialogue between the two characters in Heaven. When the marionettes then disappear behind the seat, Cleante reappears and evokes Molière's tomb. Addressing the valets working as stagehands, he shouts, "Hastez-vous. Est-il achevé? Estes-vous prests?" thus comically undermining any attempt at dramatic illusion. A curtain is then drawn, revealing a mausoleum. At this point, Cleante transforms into a poltroon, recalling the character Sganarelle in *Dom Juan ou le Festin de pierre*: he jumps back on his chair, gathers in his limbs and tries to hide. Eventually mustering up the courage to stick out his head, he looks at Molière's tomb and again begins to sob. Cleante thus parodies the art of eloquence and transforms it into an art of physical comedy, to the delight of his salon audience.

---

<sup>16</sup> Donneau de Visé, *Le Mercure galant*, 1673/4, 288-289.

<sup>17</sup> Donneau de Visé, *Le Mercure galant*, 1673/4, 290: "mais avant d'entrer dans cette Division, faisons une pose utile à nos santez, toussons, crachons, & nous mouchons harmonieusement."

When he concludes his eulogy, his audience rises and showers him with compliments. In keeping with Baldassare Castiglione's principle of *la sprezzatura*, Cleante receives these compliments in a cavalier manner, claiming that his energetic one-man show was but a "plaisanterie" that cost him little effort.<sup>18</sup> With this flippant yet strategic remark, Cleante clearly signals the return from his comical performance to his social performance, distancing himself from the overemotional, cowardly, and uncavalier characters whom he has just represented. Far from marring his social image, Cleante's antics have demonstrated his ability to act well, thus reinforcing the appearance of his general merit. Cleante jokingly and skillfully reconciles the arts of declamation and buffoonery in faithful imitation of Molière, who was praised by the theatrical apologist Samuel Chappuzeau as "bon Poëte, bon Comedien, & bon Orateur, le vray Trismégiste du Theâtre."<sup>19</sup> Through his virtuosic performance, Cleante demonstrates that he is versatile, witty, amusing, and self-confident. His remark following his performance serves to establish that these are not the qualities of a "bon Comedien," but rather of a respectable salonnier. Cleante can freely and playfully emulate Molière precisely because his subsequent air of *sprezzatura* prevents any identification between himself and Molière. Castiglione recommends that this aristocratic air of detachment appear during one's performance. Cleante's air of detachment, on the contrary, liberates his involvement in his performance.

It is difficult to surmise from the isolated accounts in Chapelain's letters and *Le Mercure galant* the frequency with which conversation may have given way to

---

<sup>18</sup> Donneau de Visé, *Le Mercure galant*, 1673/4, 319.

<sup>19</sup> Chappuzeau, *Le théâtre François*, 197.

buffoonery in real seventeenth-century salons. One can safely say that when Sorel's salonnières indulge in physical humor, in the form of a game and/or a dramatic performance, they do not necessarily stray from real salon practice. Contrary to what one might have expected, seventeenth-century salons were not adverse to buffoonery among its participants, as long as it was confined to a separate entertainment piece. According to Grimarest, burlesque comedy could not be performed reservedly or with aristocratic detachment. It required absolute freedom to "entrer dans le ridicule"; the slightest hint of self-constraint doomed it to embarrassing failure. The undertaking of such a performance thus constituted a challenge and risk that not all salonnières cared to take. The salonnières at the hôtel de Rambouillet and in *Le Berger extravagant* refrained from all buffoonery. One might infer from these examples that physical humor was generally unbecoming in ladies. However, Grimarest's list of outlandish character types for salon performance includes "la Précieuse" and "l'Extravagante, ou l'Emportée," presumably to be represented by salonnières. Physical comedy thus offered particularly bold salonnières, both male and female, the delightful opportunity to represent excessive characters so unlike themselves.

The salon art of comedy was tricky: it required free involvement in one's performance at the risk of being identified with it. This identification was the plight of professional comedians. The actress La Beau-Soleil in Georges de Scudéry's *Comédie des comédiens* bemoans the common belief "que nous ne faisons que représenter ce que nous pratiquons en effect."<sup>20</sup> Because comic actors, both male and female, were identified with their represented characters in the eyes of the public, they personally

---

<sup>20</sup> Georges de Scudéry, *La Comédie des comédiens* (I,iii) (Paris: A. Courbé, 1635), 12.

became objects of ridicule. Salonnières who performed with restraint, fearing the same confusion between themselves and their comical characters, were ridiculous rather because of their circumspection, not because of their characters. In contrast, salonnières who knew how to perform boldly without taking themselves too seriously were regarded as masters of their art, not as its servants. They were not identified with outlandish behavior, but with the talent and skill that such acting required.

### ***The Art of Impersonation***

Impersonation for the purpose of ridicule was highly popular in seventeenth-century salon society. This performance art was distinct from dramatic declamation. First, declamation entailed an artificial, stylized form of verbal and corporeal delivery. In contrast, when salonnières performed impersonations in the course of conversation, they were not obliged to perform theatrically, that is with conventional inflections, diction, and gestures. They could aspire toward a performance that really resembled the object of their imitation. Seventeenth-century writers addressing the salon art of impersonation offered conflicting opinions regarding the appropriate manner and object of imitation. For some, the distortion of the performer's features was not only physically unflattering, it was symptomatic of an inner ugliness: the malicious joy of derision directly opposing the ethos of salon culture, based on friendship and generosity. According to such writers, impersonation was to remain moderate, barely suggestive, in order to safeguard the performer from outer and inner ugliness. For others, impersonation was only effective if one accepted to use one's voice, facial features, and gestures to present a living portrait of another. The more recognizable the object of ridicule, the more commendable the performer. Still others maintained that mimetic exactitude and salon civility were

reconcilable if the object of imitation itself was not too ridiculous or if a derisive impersonation were proposed sheepishly, as if against the performer's will. The salon art of impersonation thus created a tension between the ideal of mimesis and the vice of malice, between the freedom to ridicule and the fear of reproach.

Impersonations were often performed by salonniers in the course of a storytelling.

According to Castiglione in *Il Libro del Cortegiano*,

nel ragionar lungo & continuato, come si vede di alcuni huomini, che con tanta buona gratia, & cosi piacevolmente narrano, & esprimono una cosa, che sia loro intervenuta, o veduta, o udità habbiano, che no i gesti, & con parole, la mettono innanzi agli occhi, & quasi la fan toccar con mano, & questa forse per non ci haver altro vocabulo, si porria chiamar festività overo urbanità.<sup>21</sup>

This reasoning is echoed in a letter by Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, Madame de Sévigné, addressed to her daughter:

Coulanges nous fit l'autre jour un fort plaisant conte; ce fut comme un enthousiasme. Il dit que le comte de Solre entra chez M. de Chauvri, qu'il y fit venir deux crocheteurs, qu'il fit mettre à terre deux coffres qu'ils avaient peine à porter, qu'il tira du premier qui fut ouvert une brassée de papiers et lui dit, en les jetant sur la table: "monsieur, ce sont les titres de trente-sept chevaliers de la toison d'or de ma maison", que M. de Chauvri, tout embarrassé, lui dit: "hé! Monsieur, il n'en faut pas tant. Vous me brouillez tous mes papiers. Je ne saurai plus retrouver les preuves de monsieur un tel et de monsieur un tel; ces deux noms ne sont pas comme le vôtre", que M. de Chauvri le pria d'en demeurer là, et que le comte de Solre, ne l'écoutant seulement pas, lui tira une grande liasse: "monsieur, lui dit-il, voici le contrat de mariage d'un de mes grands-pères avec Sabine de Bavière. - Hé! Monsieur, hé! Monsieur, dit M. de Chauvri, en voilà plus qu'il n'en faut." Là-dessus M. de Solre prend un grand rouleau, et se faisant aider à le dérouler, l'étend tout le long de la chambre, et lui fait voir qu'il remontait et finissait deux de ses branches par des têtes couronnées. Et toujours M. de Chauvri disant avec chagrin: "hé! Monsieur, je ne retrouverai jamais tous mes papiers." Coulanges nous joua cela si follement et si plaisamment, qu'autant que cette scène est plate sur le papier, autant elle était jolie à la voir représenter.<sup>22</sup>

As can be inferred from this account, Monsieur Coulanges accompanies his narration with expansive gestures that correspond with the excessive elements of the story (the heavy chests, the copious bundles of papers, the immense scroll resembling a *commedia dell'arte* prop). He is described as being possessed by his own performance. Coulanges

<sup>21</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 250. Castiglione's use of the term "urbanità," referring specifically to one's ability to please through mimetic demonstration, differs from Guez de Balzac's concept of "urbanité." See note 1 in the present chapter.

<sup>22</sup>Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 3:463-464.



abandons his habitual social composure in order to physically represent the count's comical arrogance and the lawyer's jittery anxiety. As Sorel maintains in *De la connoissance des bons livres*, "ce qui est présenté à nostre veüe doit toucher davantage que ce qui depend de nostre intelligence & de nôtre imagination."<sup>23</sup> Monsieur Coulanges's impersonations thus prevent his spoken anecdote from falling "flat," as Sévigné fears it might in her written account.

The performance of impersonation could also serve as a "vecteur de communication," as is demonstrated in Madeleine de Scudéry's "Conversation de parler trop ou trop peu, et comment il faut parler." The gentleman Amilcar pays the lady Plotine a courtly visit. He is surprised to find her already surrounded by his "rivals." When these men eventually leave Plotine's company, Amilcar impersonates each one in front of her, the melancholy silence of one, the talkativeness of the other, etc. Amilcar uses the art of impersonation to entertain Plotine and gain her favor, while undermining his competition and enjoying himself in the process.<sup>24</sup> After rendering them ridiculous, awkward, and affected in his representation, Amilcar resumes his gallantries toward Plotine, emphasizing the contrast between himself and the others.

Impersonations could also take place through salon game-playing, as Sorel reveals in detail. In the "Jeu des Signes" described in *La Maison des jeux* and again in *Les récréations galantes*, the members of a salon circle impersonate each other

---

<sup>23</sup> Sorel, *De la connoissance des bons livres*, 206.

<sup>24</sup> Scudéry, "Conversation de parler trop ou trop peu, et comment il faut parler" in *"De l'air galant" et autres Conversations*, 83: "quand Amilcar trouvait tous ses rivaux auprès de Plotine, il n'y en avait pas un de qui la conversation ne fût divertissante, de la manière dont Amilcar la tournait; et quand ils n'y étaient pas, il s'en divertissait encore admirablement, tantôt en contrefaisant le silence de l'un, tantôt en voulant parler trop comme l'autre [...] Si bien que par là il nuisait à ses rivaux, il divertissait sa maîtresse, et ne s'ennuyait jamais."

simultaneously. Each player imitates another's facial expression and bodily comportment, trying not to be seen by that person.<sup>25</sup> The "Jeu des Signes" can perhaps be understood to symbolically represent the common phenomenon of salonniers impersonating other salonniers. As will be discussed in the following chapters, the activity of imitation was integral to salon culture. Theorists of sociability regularly encouraged newcomers in salon society to imitate or emulate those of exemplary elegance, pronunciation, verbal expression, and physical comportment. However, between imitation out of admiration and impersonation out of mockery, the boundary was not always clear. No one escaped the possibility of being impersonated by another, as the "Jeu des Signes" playfully suggests.

Did salonniers aspire toward mimetic precision in the performance of impersonation? Castiglione maintains that an overly demonstrative impersonation in the course of a joke or storytelling compromises the speaker's moral image. The character Federico in Book II of *Il Libro del Cortegiano* claims that humans are predisposed to the action of impersonation: "non è bisogna arte alcuna, perche la natura medesima crea, & forma gli huomini atti a narrare piacevolmente, & dà loro il volto, i gesti, la voce, e le parole appropriati ad imitar ciò che vogliono."<sup>26</sup> Bernardo corrects Federico's stance, insisting that if all people have the innate capacity to imitate accurately, it is important to

---

<sup>25</sup> Sorel, *Les Recréations galantes*, 57-58: "Jeu des Bestes ou signes: avec des gestes simplement sans parler, chacun ayant choisi des gestes differens, il en a un qui commence à contrefaire celui de quelqu'un de ses compagnons, & il faut qu'incontinent celui-là fasse le mesme geste, & y joigne apres celui de quelque autre pour le surprendre. Il est besoin que ceux qui jouient tournent tantost les yeux vers l'un, & tantost vers l'autre, craignant qu'ils ne fassent leur geste sans qu'ils le voyent, & qu'ils ne soient surpris." The following detail appears in *Les Recréations galantes* and not in *La Maison des Jeux*: "Mais pource que cela seroit trop ennuyeux de jouier si long temps sans parler, ces jeux là ne durent gueres."

<sup>26</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 251.

keep in mind the social context of one's performance: "bisogna esser prudente, & haver molto rispetto alloco, al tempo, & alle persone, con lequali si parla & non descendere all buffoneria, uscire de termini."<sup>27</sup> Impersonations performed within a polite conversation must obey the dictates of decorum more than the performer's mimetic impulse. Bernardo recommends that impersonation be limited to mere evocation, particularly if the object of imitation commits "atti men che honesti": "far i movimenti d'un certo modo, che chi ode & vede per le parole & gesti nostri imagini molto piu di quello, che vede & ode & perciò s'induca a ridere."<sup>28</sup> This approach to impersonation in the context of conversation recalls the ideas presented in *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, traditionally attributed to Cicero (more recently to Cornificius):

The Tone of Conversation is relaxed, and is closer to daily speech. [...] The Facetious can on the basis of some circumstance elicit a laugh which is modest and refined [...] With a gentle quiver in the voice, and a slight suggestion of a smile, but without any trace of immoderate laughter, one to shift one's utterance smoothly from the Serious Conversational Tone to the tone of gentlemanly jest.<sup>29</sup>

No matter how ridiculous the object of imitation, the courtier must never forget the respectability of his interlocutors and his "dignità del gentilhuomo" when he undertakes this imitation. More importantly, by limiting his impersonation to mere suggestion or evocation, the courtier avoids appearing ugly both physically and morally. He who ridicules another's faults by imitating them "troppo accerbamente" acts not only like an unsightly "buffone," but also like a spiteful "inimico." Castiglione thus intimates that an impersonation represents the performer's attitude toward the object of imitation as much

---

<sup>27</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 265.

<sup>28</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 266.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in English translation by Dean A. Hoffman in "I wyll be thy true servaunte / And trewely serve thee:' Guildhall Minstrelsy in the Gest of *Robyn Hode*." *The Drama Review* 49 (2 – T 186) (Summer 2005): 121.

as the object itself. The courtier must avoid highly demonstrative impersonations because he cannot appear to derive intense pleasure from another's foibles, the way a jester or enemy does. In this manner, one can impersonate people in their very presence without offending them.<sup>30</sup> The aesthetic of understatement serves to dissimulate the degree of mockery intended. Through the art of suggestion, the courtier invites his spectators to mentally complete his character sketch as they wish. They can interpret his impersonation as either a delicate, playful raillery, recalling the gracious humor of Menander or Terence, or a laughable portrait to be derided in the privacy of their imaginations, in the biting spirit of Aristophanes or Plautus. Any malice on the part of the performer can thus be shared by his spectators without the vice appearing through performance.

Despite Castiglione's insistence on mere evocation, seventeenth-century salon culture seems to have valued mimetic precision in the art of impersonation. The character Euridamie in Scudéry's "Conversation de la raillerie" contradicts Federico's claim in *Il Libro del Cortegiano* by maintaining that the ability to impersonate is not inherently human, but an admirable talent demonstrated by only a few.<sup>31</sup> She defines impersonation as the representation of a person's "façon de parler, et son action, et même jusques à ses regards [...] comme l'imitation est son objet, plus il approchera de celui qu'il imite, et plus il méritera d'être loué."<sup>32</sup> The nature of the model is of no consequence; it is the accuracy of the imitation that excites admiration: "celui qui voudra

---

<sup>30</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 267.

<sup>31</sup> Scudéry, "Conversation de la raillerie" in *De l'air galant" et autres Conversations*, 112.

<sup>32</sup> Scudéry, "Conversation de la raillerie" in *De l'air galant" et autres Conversations*, 103, 112.

contrefaire un esclave en colère qui se plaint, aura tort s'il le fait parler comme son maître."<sup>33</sup> Euridamie admits that when poking fun with wit and elegance ("railler"), it is important to retain one's habitual composure. However, social inhibitions must be cast aside when performing an impersonation.

According to Scudéry, if the object of imitation falls into excess, the imitator has no choice but to follow suit. In her "Conversation de parler trop ou trop peu, et comment il faut parler," Amilcar tells a funny story during which he impersonates a long-winded man. His hostess Plotine declares laughingly after the storytelling, "Vous avez fait ce récit-là si plaisamment, reprit Plotine en riant, que ce serait dommage qu'il n'y eût jamais eu de gens qui eussent trop parlé, et ce qu'il y a de bon, ajouta-t-elle en raillant, c'est qu'en contrefaisant un homme qui parle beaucoup, vous ne vous contraignez pas autant qu'un autre."<sup>34</sup> Has Amilcar rendered himself unpleasant in Plotine's salon by imitating a long-winded person, as she seems to suggest? The ambiguity of her joke corresponds with the ambivalence of Amilcar's performance: he impersonates an unpleasant fellow, thus making himself unpleasant, and yet this unpleasantness is enjoyable precisely because it is done on purpose. The more unpleasant the performer, the more accurate the representation and, by extension, the more pleasing the performance.

An impersonation could serve not only to subtly evoke or vividly replicate, but grossly exaggerate the physical and behavioral traits of the original. The literary critic Patrick Dandrey points out that any imitation, regardless of its claim to faithfulness, is

---

<sup>33</sup> Scudéry, "Conversation de la raillerie" in *"De l'air galant" et autres Conversations*, 112. Scudéry's text entails a representation of seventeenth-century French salon culture transposed into Ancient Greece, hence this reference to "slaves," and not to servants.

<sup>34</sup> Scudéry, "Conversation de la raillerie" in *"De l'air galant" et autres Conversations*, 92.

necessarily selective; it is impossible to accurately represent another in all respects.<sup>35</sup> By focusing on the salient traits of the original, it was easy for the impersonator to exaggerate them and fall into caricature. Such exaggeration was not necessarily a distortion of reality; on the contrary, caricature could serve to identify and magnify the logic, or truth, underlying that reality. Dandrey's analysis of caricature seems to follow these lines: "la réalité étant si outrancière, l'outrance parfois traque la vérité essentielle à travers le grossissement des apparences [...] brouiller apparemment les lignes de l'esquisse exacte, n'en révèle que mieux les lignes de force du visage [...] dans l'optique du comique, la juste mesure réside dans la démesure."<sup>36</sup> However, the exaggerations used to ridicule another risked being negatively attributed to the performer. The seventeenth-century moralist Jean de La Bruyère describes in *Les Caractères* an impersonation by a salonnière indulging in disgraceful excesses: "Il y a du péril à contrefaire. Lise, déjà vieille, veut rendre une jeune femme ridicule, et elle-même devient difforme; elle me fait peur. Elle use pour l'imiter de grimaces & de contorsions: la voilà aussi laide qu'il faut pour embellir celle dont elle se moque."<sup>37</sup> The gross exaggerations in Lise's impersonation end up reflecting badly on herself and flattering the person she is trying to ridicule. Her ugliness is manifold. First of all, she is old and, as one can infer from La Bruyère's frankness, "déjà" lacking in physical charm. When this ugly person endeavors to represent the alleged ugliness of another, the two uglinesses cancel each other out, giving the impression that the object of her ridicule, "une jeune

---

<sup>35</sup> Dandrey, *Molière ou L'esthétique du ridicule*, 16-17: "Toute imitation suppose en effet un tri," "[une] sélection nécessaire" due to "la fatalité de l'approximation par rapport au réel."

<sup>36</sup> Dandrey, *Molière ou L'esthétique du ridicule*, 43.

<sup>37</sup> La Bruyère, *Les caractères*, 128.

femme,” is probably beautiful. Instead of sharing in Lise’s mockery, La Bruyère suspects the performer’s distorted interpretation of reality. He interprets Lise’s performance as an inadvertent self-caricature. She disgraces only herself, which is the natural, just consequence of her ill will. As Saint François de Sales makes clear in his discussion of conversation etiquette:

Rien n’est si contraire à la charité, et beaucoup plus à la dévotion, que le mépris et contemnement du prochain. Or, la dérision et moquerie ne se fait jamais sans ce mépris; c’est pourquoi elle est un fort grand péché, en sorte que les docteurs ont raison de dire que la moquerie est la plus mauvaise sorte d’offense [...] parce que les autres offenses se font avec quelque estime de celui qui est offensé, et celle-ci se fait avec mépris et contemnement.<sup>38</sup>

Lise resembles the buffoon and the enemy evoked by Castiglione; her excessive spite underlies and undermines her exaggerated performance.

Antoine Gombault, chevalier de Méré endeavors to reconcile mimetic exactitude in the art of impersonation and the aristocratic performer’s image of dignity and generosity. Unlike Scudéry, he does not believe that a salonnier deserves praise or admiration for an accurate, recognizable impersonation, as he tells Madame de Lesdiguières:

On peut observer deux sortes d’Agrémens.<sup>39</sup> Les uns plaisent par eux memes, et font toujours que l’on aime ceux qui les ont: comme en vous voyant, Madame, on est enchanté sans penser qu’à ce qu’on a devant les yeux. Il y a une autre nature d’Agrémens qui ne subsistent que par un rapport à quelque autre chose, et qui font bien dire qu’on réussit dans le personnage qu’on jouë, mais qui ne font point aimer celui qui le jouë, quoy qu’il s’en acquitte en perfection. B\*\*\* vous divertissoit quand il contrefaisoit les Courtisans du Nort qui ne savent ni nos modes ni nostre langue, et qui ne sont pas obligez de les sçavoir, mais vous ne l’en aimiez pas mieux. Et ce qui

<sup>38</sup> Saint François de Sales, *Introduction à la vie dévote*, 207.

<sup>39</sup> Not to be confused with “les agrémens du Chant.” The “agrémén” is theorized at length by Méré as an aesthetic and affective quality in a person that comes to light during social interaction. Méré often presents the term in the plural form; a person’s “agrémens” constitute an ensemble of subtle, diverse traits with an unexplainable “charm” appealing subjectively to the senses as well as the heart. They can entail the aesthetic qualities in one’s appearance, physical movements, and speaking voice and the affective qualities in one’s behavior, whether somber, playful, serious, etc. One of Méré’s writings begins with a portrait of his dedicatee’s “agrémens:” “Vous enchantez du son de vôte voix sitost que vous parlez; et ce qui fait principalement que vous plaisez toujours, c’est que vous avez l’esprit fin, avec une extrême justesse à parler, à vous taire, à être douce ou fiere, enjouée ou serieuse, et à prendre dans les moindres choses que vous dites le meilleur ton et le meilleur tour.” See Méré, “Discours des Agrémens,” 2:10.

vous réjouissoit de ces plaisanteries, c'est qu'elles vous remettoient dans l'esprit des choses naïves qui vous avoient fait rire. Ainsi, Madame, ce qui vous plaisoit alors n'estoit pas tant ce que vous consideriez en luy, que ce que vous aviez veu ailleurs.<sup>40</sup>

When an impersonation is performed “to perfection,” that is, when the performer is completely transformed into the represented character, the performer is effaced by that character. The performer becomes entirely transparent, invisible to the spectators who imagine that they are in the presence of the represented character. They enjoy the performance, but they do not necessarily admire the performer.

By downplaying the merit of a vivid impersonation, Méré expresses his disapproval of this performance art. The reasons for his disapproval, however, are not consistent throughout his writings. Like La Bruyère, he elsewhere insists that the impersonator is not transparent, that one's social image suffers from the representation of another's faults and eccentricities. One can avoid this disgrace by modifying the object of one's imitation:

L'autre jour une fort belle fille contrefaisait des Dames ridicules devant sa mere qui n'en rioit point, et qui fronçoit les sourcils, & comme cette fille enjouée s'en étonnoit; “Que j'aurois de joye, lui dit sa mere, si vous pouviez contrefaire M. de \*\*\* qui fait toûjours moins rire que soupirer!” Cet avertissement peut beaucoup servir pour se faire aimer. Car quand on a ce dessein, il ne faut imiter ny contrefaire que ce qu'on trouve de plus agreable.<sup>41</sup>

The mother in Méré's anecdote wishes her daughter would impersonate Monsieur de \*\*\* because his charm becomes her blossoming social image more than the excesses of ridiculous ladies. Thus, according to Méré, an impersonation that ambitiously resembles and ridicules its object causes the performer to be either overshadowed or disgraced by that object. Since this art generally aspired toward mimetic precision in seventeenth-century salon culture, Méré insists that the object of imitation be less ridiculous than

---

<sup>40</sup> Méré, “Discours des Agrémens,” 2:17-18.

<sup>41</sup> Méré, “Discours des Agrémens,” 2:18.



“agréable,” making one’s interlocutors laugh more joyfully than derisively. Those who mercilessly mock others are like “des gens qui ne vont dans le monde que comme des chiffonniers dans les rues, qui amassent avec un crochet tous les haillons et les ordures qu’ils trouvent.”<sup>42</sup> Salonnières are supposed to embody only pleasant characters, not for the purpose of mockery, but in order to flatter and embellish their social grace.

Through this anecdote, Méré clearly separates the practice of impersonation from the intention to ridicule. Why would anyone want to make fun of “ce qu’on trouve de plus agreable”? This insistence on pleasantness seems to rob impersonation of its piquant appeal, what Méré refers to as *il condimento* in conversation.<sup>43</sup> Saint François de Sales, whose sense of Christian decency and generosity pervades the *Introduction à la vie dévote*, admits how amusing it can be to poke fun at “les occasions frivoles que les imperfections humaines fournissent,” in a spirit of “eutrapelia.” However, this gentle sense of humor never develops into the vindictive laughter of mockery:

Mais quant aux jeux de paroles qui se font des uns aux autres avec une modeste gaieté et joyeuseté, ils appartiennent à la vertu nommée eutrapélie par les Grecs, que nous pouvons appeler bonne conversation; et par iceux on prend une honnête et amiable récréation sur les occasions frivoles que les imperfections humaines fournissent. Il se faut garder seulement de passer de cette honnête joyeuseté à la moquerie. Or, la moquerie provoque à rire par mépris et contemnement du

---

<sup>42</sup> Méré, “Divers propos du Chevalier de Méré en 1674-1675”: manuscrit 4556 de la Bibliothèque Mazarine, publié et annoté par Ch. –H. Boudhors dans la *Revue d’Histoire Littéraire de la France* (janv.-mars 1922): 94. More bibliographic information regarding these “Divers propos” is found in Méré, *Œuvres complètes*, 1:xiv, note 3: “L’authenticité de ce petit cahier nous paraît résister à toutes les objections; encore mieux à tous les doutes arbitraires. Il est rédigé, en notes abrégées ou tronquées, par un auditeur-élève de Méré; écrit parfois sous la dictée du Maître, souvent au cours de la conversation, quand une saillie, un souvenir, sont à recueillir; ou au sortir d’un entretien, au retour d’une promenade. Et ce cahier est resté aux mains de Méré, qui, à notre avis, y a fait quelques corrections; il l’a conservé – ainsi que d’autres qui ne sont point parvenus jusqu’à nous – comme un répertoire, d’où, selon un procédé de travail que des contemporains nous certifient, il tire les matériaux de ses Discours et de ses Lettres.”

<sup>43</sup> Méré, “Discours de la conversation,” 2:106; “Discours VI: Suite du commerce du monde,” 3:172: “Car la douceur est sujette à déguster [...] Il y a des gens qui ne plaisent que lors qu’on les pique, et qu’on les met en jeu [...] Quand on ménage ces sortes de gens par quelque loüange douteuse & suspecte, qui les tiennent en suspens, leur mine, leurs façons les rendent de bonne compagnie.”

prochain; mais la gaieté et gauserie provoque à rire par une simple liberté, confiance et familière franchise [...]<sup>44</sup>

By divorcing impersonation from ridicule, Méré intimates that its appeal in salon culture is one of pure “délectation mimétique,” to use Dandrey’s expression: the joy of representing the pleasant aspects of life, and not the ugly ones, without the need to censure through laughter.

One cannot help but notice that the examples of bad impersonators provided by La Bruyère and Méré are both female, the first one old and ugly and the second one young and pretty. Was the performance art of impersonation deemed inappropriate for salonnières? Impersonators used their body and voice to represent those of another, offering themselves as the canvas on which this living portrait was represented and ridiculed. Scudéry, who depicts only gentleman impersonators, provides her salonnières with a different recourse in the representation of the unsightly: verbal portraiture. A lively description serves a mimetic function without compromising the physical image of the speaker. In her “Conversation de la colère,” for example, Lisimene represents a friend’s hot temper through vivid language, presumably without physical demonstration:

‘[...] elle changea d’abord de voix, de visage, & d’action; & cette même personne qui un moment auparavant avoit le teint reposé, les yeux doux, & l’air modeste, ne fut plus rien de tout cela [...] Cependant les lis & les roses de son beau teint se confondirent de telle sorte qu’on ne les discernoit plus du tout; car elle estoit toute rouge, le blanc de ses yeux n’estoit plus même tout à fait blanc; & comme elle les a grands naturellement, la colere les faisoit paraître trop grands & trop ouverts. Ils estoient troubles & égarez; elle regardait comme si elle n’eût pas bien vû; sa bouche avoit changé de forme à force de crier, elle disoit cent fois la même chose, & elle ressembloit bien plus à une Bacchante en fureur qu’à ce qu’elle a accoutumé d’estre.’<sup>45</sup>

The salonnière Clariste praises Lisimene’s verbal portrait in the following terms: “Vous representez si bien cette bizarre colere, repliqua Clariste, & vous la faites paroistre si

---

<sup>44</sup> See François de Sales, *Introduction à la Vie Dévote*, 207.

<sup>45</sup> Scudéry, “Conversation de la colère” in *Conversations morales*, 1:317-320.

ridicule, qu'encore que naturellement je sois capable d'en avoir, je ne puis craindre qu'elle m'oblige jamais à faire rien de pareil."<sup>46</sup> Lisimene does not have to distort her traits in order to make her friend's fury "appear" in the imagination of her interlocutors, if not before their eyes. Similar to the evocative impersonation recommended by Castiglione, a "belle description" befits a salonnière more than a demonstrative impersonation. Scudéry seems to suggest that a salonnière would disgrace herself if she imitated the unattractive behavior of another.

Still, it may be simplistic to attribute the conservative stance of Méré to the sole question of gender. One must also keep in mind that the salonnière in his latter anecdote is young and inexperienced. When he recommends that impersonations be more pleasant than derisive, Méré seems to be addressing all young novices in salon society. The art of impersonation for the purpose of ridicule, however, demands careful, more expert handling in order for the impersonator to avoid appearing malicious. It seems that Méré was famously adept at this art. He was even capable of impersonating malicious impersonators.<sup>47</sup> In a mimetic *mise en abyme* worthy of Molière in *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, Méré was thus able to distinguish in his performance between the ridiculousness of a malicious impersonator and that of the original object, limiting his mockery to the former. When Méré maliciously mocked malicious impersonators, the two forms of malice cancelled each other out, rendering his mockery, ironically, virtuous.

---

<sup>46</sup> Scudéry, "Conversation de la colère" in *Conversations morales*, 1:323.

<sup>47</sup> Méré, "Divers propos" in *R.H.L.* (janv.-mars 1922): 94: "Il y a des gens qui ne vont dans le monde que comme des chiffonniers dans les rues, qui amassent avec un crochet tous les haillons et les ordures qu'ils trouvent.' Le rédacteur des notes ajoute: 'Il (Méré) les contrefaisoit.'"

Unlike the young girl in his anecdote, more skillful impersonators like himself managed to represent the ridiculous without appearing malicious.

Méré maintains that not all pleasures are equal, echoing Socrates in the dialogue *Philebus*. The platonic conception of malice entails an immoral combination of pleasure and pain: the subject's desire to mock and scorn an object is born of the subject's painful regard for that object, but the cruel pleasure of mockery is ineffective in alleviating this pain. The malice of impersonators likened by Méré to "des chiffonniers dans la rue" stems from their erroneous belief that they are superior to the object of their imitation, what Saint François de Sales describes as "mépris et contemnement du prochain." However, as Méré tells the maréchal de Clérambaut in his "Première Conversation," " Sans mentir ce n'est pas assez que d'avoir de l'esprit, il faut estre encore extrêmement honneste homme pour estre plaisant de cet air-là."<sup>48</sup> It is not enough to perform one's impersonation with mimetic exactitude; one must somehow demonstrate a generous attitude toward the object of one's ridicule. Méré's ideal of the *honnête homme* swears by the Delphic command "Know Thyself" and the virtue of magnanimity in *Nicomachean Ethics*. Without the element of generosity, the impersonator can give others pleasure, but this pleasure is immoral and imperfect: "Mais parce que la plupart des gens n'ont pas le sentiment délicat, il arrive souvent qu'ils sont touchez, et mesme charmez de certains roolles qu'on leur joüe [...] Il me semble qu'on ne doit pas envier de pareils agrémens."<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the impersonator does not comport himself as an *honnête homme* whom his interlocutors genuinely and generally like, but rather as the lowly,

---

<sup>48</sup> Méré, "Première Conversation," 1:9.

<sup>49</sup> Méré, "Première Conversation," 1:9.

malicious stage actor evoked in *Philebus*, sufferable only when he is performing: “Vous comprenez bien qu’il se trouve assez de personnes qui donnent du plaisir, et que néanmoins cela ne fait pas qu’on les aime, né qu’on s’intéresse en ce qui les regarde.”<sup>50</sup>

How can impersonators dissociate malice from the imitation of the ridiculous? Is it possible to magnanimously ridicule someone? If the art of impersonation inherently pits aesthetic considerations (the ideal of mimesis) against ethical ones (the ideal of generosity), is it even possible to make them agree? Castiglione, as one recalls, suggests that the exactitude of imitation must be compromised, reduced to mere evocation, in order to avoid resembling both the “buffoon” and the “enemy.” Méré, who does not want to limit the performer’s mimetic freedom, nonetheless finds a solution, thanks to Castiglione, to the aesthetic and ethical dilemma of impersonation. The pain in malice must be redirected: from the object of imitation to the very act of imitation. Indeed, impersonators must evince a certain disdain for their own performance, as if it pained them to act in this manner, in order to demonstrate their generosity. The intense pleasure in performance studied in my previous chapter is therefore entirely inappropriate in the salon art of impersonation, which requires, on the contrary, *la sprezzatura*. As the maréchal states with regard to this practice, “les honnestes gens n’en sont pas *volontiers* les acteurs.”<sup>51</sup> Similarly, when Méré describes in his “Divers propos” the entertaining impersonations performed by his brother Jozias, sieur de Plassac, he hastens to add, “Il regardoit cela comme un défaut en luy, et il n’aimoit pas qu’on l’en louast.”<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Méré, “Première Conversation,” 1:9.

<sup>51</sup> Méré, “Première Conversation,” 1:9. Emphasis mine.

<sup>52</sup> Méré, “Divers propos” in *R.H.L.* (Jul.-Sept. 1925): 437.

Impersonations must be offered involuntarily, at least in appearance, as if one were ashamed of one's performance. As long as this social and ethical stance is established before and/or after the performance, the performer is free to mock the ugly and ridiculous.

Does not the performance of *la sprezzatura* imply a certain hypocrisy, a manner of dissimulating one's malice and feigning generosity, incommensurate with Méré's fundamental social ideal of *honnêteté*? Undoubtedly, Méré regretted the immorality of a practice that he could not help but enjoy as both performer and spectator. This is why he discouraged young salonniers from attempting it and why he insisted on the ambivalence of more seasoned impersonators. In a gesture of self-flagellation, Méré makes this final comment on his talent as an impersonator: "Ceux qui réussissent si bien en ces choses grossières n'ont point de talent pour ces choses tendres et délicates."

Thus the impersonation of a laughable subject required utmost finesse in a salon setting. A malicious impersonation disgraced both the performer and the audience that took pleasure in this malice. If Amilcar's impersonations in Scudéry's "Conversation de parler trop ou trop peu" only flatter his social image, other impersonators in seventeenth-century salons avoided appearing physically and morally ugly by appearing ashamed of their scathing mockery or by limiting their imitation to "ce qu'on trouve de plus agreable." Still others avoided all such ambiguities by resorting to mimesis through verbal portraiture. There were no set rules regarding one's manner of ridiculing another, the intention behind this ridicule, and the way it would be interpreted by one's interlocutors. Different combinations of mimetic freedom and moral constraint could render the art of impersonation both entertaining and socially acceptable in salon society.

### *A Modest Performance*

Was the manifestation of passion by salonnières incompatible with the feminine virtue of modesty?<sup>53</sup> One cannot provide a simple answer to this question. Certainly, there existed a tension between their desire to freely represent passion in and through art and the social pressure on women to conceal their capacity for passion. How far could the artistic representation of passion be pushed before it endangered the salonnière's social image of modesty? For some, the very act of performance was dangerous and to be avoided; they did not want to be compared to female stage artists who were notorious for their brazenness and wanton lifestyles. Others considered passion in performance as a form of exhibitionism and licentiousness; they felt they had no choice but to temper its representation, reducing it to playful gallantry, in order to protect their reputation. Still others unabashedly represented passion in their performances, judging their art and their social image to be independent of each other. Through the representation of passion, salonnières could demonstrate their artistic merit, but they could also run the risk of tarnishing their virtuous reputation. The present section endeavors to account for these different attitudes toward the performance of passion by women.

The artistic representation of passion by gentlemen salonniers does not seem to have entailed the same social risks. On the contrary, such a performance could flatter their social image. Sévigné describes in 1687 such a performance by her son Charles for a circle of friends near an abbey where her late uncle lived:

[...] mais l'abbaye, cette jolie abbaye où je vous ai mené, qui vous fit faire un joli couplet sur les chemins, et où mon fils, par un enthousiasme qui nous réjouit, assis sur un trône de gazon, dans un

---

<sup>53</sup> The term "modesty" in this context corresponds with the definition appearing in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962): "Womanly propriety of behavior; scrupulous chastity of thought, speech, and conduct."

petit bois, nous dit toute une scène de *Mithridate* avec les tons et les gestes, et surprit tellement notre modestie chrétienne que vous crûtes être à la comédie, alors que vous y pensiez le moins.<sup>54</sup>

Charles de Sévigné is said to recite an entire scene from the tragedy *Mithridate* by Jean Racine. Assuming that Charles represents only one seated character pronouncing a soliloquy, and assuming that the scene is of considerable length (“nous dit *toute* une scène”), the passage in question is either (III, iv), in which the enraged king Mithridate prepares to trick his fiancée into revealing her love for his son, or more likely (IV, v), in which Mithridate is torn by conflicting passions of affection and hatred for his son and fiancée, his fear of betrayal, his pain from unrequited love, and his duty to forsake passion in the name of glory. “Avec les tons et les gestes” of tragic theatrical declamation,<sup>55</sup> Charles represents a king being devoured by his emotions. Charles performs his scene while sitting on the grass in the absence of a real throne. It is also likely that Charles’s spectators are seated on the ground around him, taking rest in the shade from their promenade in the abbey. Charles’s passionate performance is said to shock the “modestie chrétienne” of the other salonniers in this pious setting. In his *Traité de l’éducation des filles*, published in the same year of 1687, François de Salignac de La Mothe-Fénelon associates the arousal of passions, theatrical performance, impiety, and poison,<sup>56</sup> in opposition to “la modestie chrétienne”:

---

<sup>54</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 3:330.

<sup>55</sup> Seventeenth-century theatrical conventions governing vocal inflection and gesture were modeled after the art of declamation practiced by orators. See *Sept traités sur le jeu du comédien et autres textes*, edited by Sabine Chaouche, for a detailed presentation of these conventions in treatises by Michel Le Faucheur and René Bary.

<sup>56</sup> Mithridates VI, King of Pontus, supposedly achieved immunity to poison by ingesting non-lethal amounts of it over time, a process thereafter termed mithridatism. See Jean Racine, *Mithridate* (IV, v) in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999): “Quoi! des plus chères mains craignant les trahisons, / J’ai pris soin de m’armer contre tous les poisons; / J’ai su, par une longue et pénible industrie, / Des plus mortels venins prévenir la furie.”



[...] montrez les règles de la modestie chrétienne. [...] Ayez donc horreur des nudités de gorge et de toutes les autres immodesties: quand même on commettrait ces fautes sans aucune mauvaise passion, du moins c'est une vanité, c'est un désir effréné de plaire. Cette vanité justifie-t-elle devant Dieu et devant les hommes une conduite si téméraire, si scandaleuse et si contagieuse pour autrui? Cet aveugle désir de plaire convient-il à une âme chrétienne, qui doit regarder comme une idolâtrie tout ce qui détourne de l'amour du Créateur et du mépris des créatures? Mais quand on cherche à plaire, que prétend-on? N'est-ce pas d'exciter les passions des hommes? Les tient-on dans ses mains pour les arrêter? Si elles vont trop loin, ne doit-on pas s'en imputer toutes les suites? Et ne vont-elles pas toujours trop loin, si peu qu'elles soient allumées? Vous préparez un poison subtil et mortel; vous le versez sur tous les spectateurs, et vous vous croyez innocentes!<sup>57</sup>

“La modestie chrétienne” does not carry the same meaning between Sévigné’s account and Fénelon’s admonition: Sévigné is referring to religious piety regardless of one’s gender, whereas Fénelon is referring to the chastity expected of women. Charles de Sévigné’s dramatic performance as Mithridate can hardly be likened to the provocative “immodesties” of coquettes. Still, Fénelon’s metaphor between the stage performer and the coquette, both of whom specialize in the emotional arousal, manipulation, and corruption of their “spectateurs,” reveals how problematic such a passionate performance by a salonnière might be. Notice in the passage by Fénelon that both the stage performer and the coquette are motivated by an “aveugle désir de plaire”; in other words, they are guilty of affectation. Mme de Sévigné does not attribute her son’s energetic performance to affectation, but rather to his “enthousiasme” for Racine’s text as he spontaneously recalls it. Pleasure in the dramatic text spreads from the performer to the spectators (“par un enthousiasme qui nous réjouit”) in spite of their “modestie chrétienne.” Nevertheless, Charles’s spontaneous representation through theatrical gestures and vocal inflections of a lengthy, passionate soliloquy from an acclaimed tragedy, all while seated casually and unassuming on the ground, is a tour de force met with admiration and respect among the other salonnières. The fact that this pleasant gentleman can suddenly transform into a

---

<sup>57</sup> Fénelon, *Traité de l’éducation des filles* (1687) (Paris: Ch. Delagrave, 1883), 113-114.

passionate actor only flatters his social image as a talented connoisseur of then-contemporary theater.

Women in a salon setting, on the other hand, were not always as free to express emotion, particularly that of love, whether in artistic performance or in conversation. The literary historian Delphine Denis has noted that salon interaction was itself based on a “métaphore érotique”: each interlocutor endeavored to please the others with the fervor of a lover trying to please his mistress. Amorous love was not only a metaphor for polite social interaction. It was considered an important means by which this form of sociability was transmitted. According to François Sarasin and many other writers of the seventeenth century, it was primarily through the process of courtship that men learned how to approach women in a pleasing, civil manner, both as potential lovers and as polite interlocutors.<sup>58</sup> Their “maîtresses” were their mistresses in the game of love and their instructors in the art of sociability. It is generally thought that salon conversations were presided over by women, or at least by a “feminine” sensibility to which one’s speech and behavior necessarily catered. The historian Jacques Revel states that the seventeenth-century salon was “un espace privé, intime gouverné par une femme, et dans lequel la fréquentation des femmes joue un rôle capital dans la civilisation des mœurs.”<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the historian Georgia Cowart refers to “the shift from a valor-centered to a pleasure-centered society, attributable in part to the growth of influence of women and to

---

<sup>58</sup> Sarasin, “S’il faut qu’un jeune homme soit amoureux / Dialogue,” 151: Chapelain tells Ménage: “tout ce que vous avez de civilité et de politesse, vous l’avez appris auprès des femmes qui vous ont soufferts & que vous avez aimées”; 153: Ménage qualifies as a “vieille thèse” the idea that “il est impossible qu’un homme soit fort propre pour le monde s’il n’a été amoureux en sa jeunesse”; 220: Chapelain again says to Ménage, “Je ne connais pas même, à parler sincèrement, un homme qui respecte ni qui estime plus les dames que vous, afin de ne rien dire de vos amours, qui vous ont fait prendre pour le vrai pasteur fidèle.”

<sup>59</sup> Revel, “Les Usages de la civilité,” 196.

the fashion of galanterie that gradually supplanted earlier ideals of masculine valor.”<sup>60</sup>

This historical interpretation is consistent with what Nicolas Faret writes in his treatise

*L'Honneste homme ou, L'art de plaire à la cour:*

[la conversation des femmes] est la plus douce & la plus agreable, elle est aussi la plus difficile & la plus delicate de toutes les autres. Celle des hommes est plus vigoureuse & plus libre, & pource qu'elle est ordinairement remplie de matieres plus solides & plus serieuses, ils prennent moins garde aux fautes qui s'y commettent que les femmes, qui ayant l'esprit plus prompt, & ne l'ayant pas chargé de tant de choses qu'eux, s'aperçoivent aussi plustost de ces petits manquements, & sont plus prontes à les relever.<sup>61</sup>

For Scudéry in “La Conversation de l'air galant,” it is through courtship that gentlemen learn how to court and, more generally, to comport themselves pleasantly in the company of all women. By exercising their sexual power over men, women can civilize their manners and cultivate their minds. They can transform their ungainly lovers into gentlemen who know how ladies want to be addressed and treated: “si elles savaient bien se servir de tous les privilèges de leur sexe; elles leur apprendraient à être véritablement galants, et elles n'endureraient pas qu'ils perdissent jamais devant elles le respect qu'ils leur doivent.”<sup>62</sup> As Patrick Dandrey specifies, “les femmes revendiqu[aient] non pas l'égalité, mais une déférence exprimée au contraire par des marques de distinction dans le traitement qu'on leur accordait.”<sup>63</sup> If one's polished manners do not succeed in winning a mistress's heart, they nonetheless prove valuable in mixed salon company.

---

<sup>60</sup> Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 11.

<sup>61</sup> Faret, *L'Honneste homme*, 220-221. See also the first edition of the *Dictionnaire de L'Académie française* (1694), which presents the following definition of the term “ruelle”: “*Ruelle*, se dit aussi quelquefois des Assemblées qui se font chez les Dames pour des conversations d'esprit. *Cet homme est bien receu dans toutes les ruelles. C'est un homme de ruelle, il brille dans les ruelles. Les belles ruelles. Les ruelles delicates. Les ruelles sçavantes, polies.*”

<sup>62</sup> Scudéry, “Conversation de l'air galant” in “*De l'air galant*” et autres *Conversations*, 55.

<sup>63</sup> Dandrey, “Préface. La sagesse de l'élégance,” f.

Even in conversations among gentlemen, the ideals of elegance, eloquence, and naturalness were not necessarily absent, unlike what Faret maintains above.<sup>64</sup> In “S’il faut qu’un jeune homme soit amoureux,” Sarasin’s literary representation of a conversation among men, the erudition of the interlocutors is made more impressive by their politesse and verbal elegance. At the same time, Sarasin’s interlocutors recognize that a man’s sense of civility, in the company of either women or men, can only have been acquired through his interaction with women. In his “Discours de l’esprit,” the chevalier de Méré refers to the “agrémens du monde,” the “goust,” and the “sentiments” deemed necessary for all polite conversations, whether or not in mixed company. Faret claims that conversations among men are “ordinairement remplie de matieres plus solides & plus serieuses.” Méré would disagree. Recalling his conversation with Blaise Pascal, le duc de Roannez, and Damien Mitton during a journey to Poitou, he writes, “parce que c’estoit plutôt une promenade qu’un voyage: nous ne songions qu’à nous réjouir, et nous discourions de tout.”<sup>65</sup> Nowhere in his writings does Méré explicitly attribute the art of civility to a feminine sensibility or influence. Perhaps he is implying that men can independently aspire toward elegance and graciousness without appearing emasculated. Or maybe he takes for granted the civilizing role generally played by women in polite society.

---

<sup>64</sup> I am indebted to Matthew Jones’s *The Good Life in the Scientific Revolution* for bringing to my attention the importance of politeness in the erudite conversation circles among men in seventeenth-century France. Citing “the conferences of Mersenne, later those of Le Pailleur and Bourdelot, the salons of Jansenists,” Jones argues that these groups used the art of conversation as a means of practicing “a form of intellectual civility that stressed rigor and solidity of reasoning.” Through such conversations, interlocutors developed “both the intellectual and the social skills deemed necessary for productive discussion,” as distinct from heated, long-winded, and notoriously uncivil scholarly debates among savants. See Jones, *The Good Life in the Scientific Revolution*, 93.

<sup>65</sup> Méré, *Discours de l’Esprit*, 2:86-88.

Returning to Scudéry's "Conversation de l'air galant" and the civilizing power of love, a double standard clearly appears between the sexes. Whereas men can only learn the art of civility by courting women and endeavoring to please them, women do not require love to polish their manners:

[...] encore qu'il faut même qu'un homme ait eu au moins une fois en sa vie, quelque légère inclination amoureuse, pour acquérir parfaitement l'air galant [...] il faut qu'il ait eu le cœur un peu engagé; je soutiens aussi, que pour faire qu'une dame ait ce même air, il suffit qu'elle ait reçu une disposition favorable de la nature; qu'elle ait vu le monde; qu'elle ait su connaître les honnêtes gens; et qu'elle ait eu dessein de plaire en général, sans aimer rien en particulier.<sup>66</sup>

According to Scudéry, a man learns the art of civility in the presence of women from having practiced the art of gallantry for one woman's affections. A woman, on the other hand, can acquire a pleasant "air galant" in society by being loved by many men and not loving anyone in particular ("qu'elle ait eu dessein de plaire en général, sans aimer rien en particulier"). She responds to her suitors' advances lightly, playfully, almost indifferently in the interest of feminine chastity and propriety, thus creating a safely erotic dynamic between the sexes.

At the same time, a salonnière's modesty was not commensurate with prudishness. Polite conversation could accommodate a certain degree of libertinage from both sexes, with the understanding that it was only playful and strictly verbal. Méré maintains that "la plûpart des Dames du premier rang et le plus belles Princesses regardent la retenue en amour comme une vertu bourgeoise; et de-là vient qu'elles s'en expliquent volontiers comme les simples Bergeres."<sup>67</sup> Though he writes about eighteenth-century French salon culture, the following assessment by the historian Antoine Lilti can also apply to the seventeenth century:

<sup>66</sup> Scudéry, "Conversation de l'air galant" in *"De l'air galant" et autres Conversations*, 51-52.

<sup>67</sup> Méré, "Discours IV: De la Delicatesse dans les choses," 3:124. Emphasis mine.

[...] une grande liberté de ton régnait dans la plupart des sociétés pour évoquer des sujets à tonalité érotique [...] cette liberté de ton est d'abord une élégance, une désinvolture affectée à propos de la morale sexuelle [...] cette élégance est peut-être surtout langagière [...] les gestes en revanche étaient soigneusement maintenus dans le cadre d'une assez stricte décence et d'un respect des bienséances dont nul n'était dupe.<sup>68</sup>

As will be discussed in the following chapter, the art of gallantry practiced by men was an openly artificial and affected verbal performance. On the contrary, as Scudéry and Méré seem to imply, a playful “air galant” befitting a salonnière called for simplicity and ingenuousness (“comme les simples Bergeres”), such that a little verbal mischief never degenerated into bawdiness and never threw doubt on her virtue.

Thus when a woman represented passion in an artistic performance for mixed salon company, she did so against a backdrop of social connotations and moral judgments. The representation of passion was associated most strongly with the performance of song. In her article “The Courtesan’s Singing Body as Cultural Capital in Seventeenth-Century Italy,” the musicologist Bonnie Gordon studies the problematic implications that singing had for female amateur singers in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This unease was due to the fact that solo singing was heavily associated in Italy with courtesans.<sup>69</sup> Likened to the figure of the siren from antiquity, courtesans used the affects of song to enchant and dominate their male listeners, corresponding with the “poison subtil et mortel” of the coquette in Fénelon’s text discussed earlier. The image of the siren could also be associated with French

---

<sup>68</sup> Lilti, *Le monde des salons*, 242-243.

<sup>69</sup> The musicologist Giuseppe Gerbino qualifies these courtesans as “professionals of high culture” who were admired but not respected. See Gerbino, *Music and the Myth of Arcadia in Renaissance Italy*, 214-215: “a social abyss separated the ‘dotta,’ but nonetheless ‘ignobile,’ Vincenza from the ladies of the Ferrarese, Mantuan, and Florentine courts [...] ‘You should remember that she was born ignoble, and that she sells gestures and words on the stage for money.’”

salonnières in the seventeenth century, as in the “Epistre à Madame la baronne de Soye”

by Jean Millet:

[...] puisque cette belle manière que [ma méthode] enseigne de charmer innocemment l’oreille, n’est autre chose qu’une expression toute simple des mouvements, & des accords dont vostre voix, & vostre Luth sçavent former cette incomparable harmonie qui m’a ravy autant de fois que j’ay eu le bon-heur de l’ouïr. Aussi ne crois-je point user d’exaggeration lorsque je dis, Madame, que vous pouvez faire autant de merveilles que l’Antiquité fabuleuse en attribuoit aux Sirenes, avec cette difference neantmoins que la melodie de leur chant estoit fatale à ceux qui s’y laissoient surprendre, & que les admirateurs de vos concerts n’en reçoivent d’autre dommage que celui de se voir trop tost priver d’un plaisir si charmant.<sup>70</sup>

While acknowledging the seductive qualities of the baronne’s passionate singing, Millet endeavors to mitigate its immoral implications through expressions like “charmer innocemment” and “plaisir si charmant.” Amorous passion represented in a salonnière’s performance risked being interpreted as a form of exhibitionism. As the historical musicologist Anne-Madeleine Goulet observes, “Lorsqu’ils sont chantés, les mots acquièrent une consistance en bouche qui augmente leur pouvoir de séduction.”<sup>71</sup> In a salon setting, artful diction and unconventional verbal rhythms drew attention to the performer’s lips and teeth, features that may have attracted less attention during conversation. The perversity of a salonnière’s passionate performance lay in the possibility that she really felt, perhaps for one of her listeners, the powerful emotions she was only supposed to represent, that this representation was a type of seduction.

According to Bénigne de Bacilly in his *Remarques curieuses sur l’art de bien chanter*, most salonnières avoid singing with expressive ornamentation representing

<sup>70</sup> Millet, “Epistre à Madame la baronne de Soye” in *La Belle méthode ou l’Art de bien chanter*, n.p.

<sup>71</sup> Goulet, *Poésie, musique et sociabilité au XVIIe siècle*, 250-251, 351. A lady’s fine mouth and teeth were also admired during conversation when she laughed. Scudéry’s character Amilcar mentions that when a lovely woman laughs, he tries to catch a glimpse of her “dents bien blanches” and her “lèvres incarnates.” See Scudéry, “Conversation de parler trop ou trop peu, et comment il faut parler” in “*De l’air galant*” et autres *Conversations*, 85. See also Sorel, “Discours académique contre la melancholie” in *Nouveau recueil*, 496: “Que si dans la vehemence du ris les plus modestes filles ne sçauroient empescher que leur bouche ne s’ouvre, l’on y trouvera tous les tresors de l’Orient, & au-delà des barrières de corail l’on verra deux rangs de perles fines.”

diverse passions in the interest of their reputation: “la plupart des Femmes ne parviennent jamais à acquiescer cette manière d’expression, qu’elles s’imaginent estre contre la modestie du sexe, & tenir du Theatre, & rendent par ce moyen leur Chant tout à fait inanimé, faute de vouloir un peu feindre.”<sup>72</sup> The female stage singer evoked by Bacilly, like the Italian courtesan, specializes in the immodest *mise en scène* of her body and emotions in order to seduce her spectators.

The salonnières described by Bacilly are thus reluctant to represent passion because they fear any associations with professional performers.<sup>73</sup> The condemnation of stage artists, their undisciplined manner of declaiming, and their indecent manner of living was commonplace among moralists of the period. In *La Comédie des comédiens* by Georges de Scudéry, Madeleine’s brother, these hapless members of society are given the opportunity to express and defend themselves. The actress La Beau-Soleil speaks openly about the unacknowledged virtue of female stage artists:

Les eaux dormantes ne sont pas les plus saines, & la vertu se trouve pour le moins aussi souvent dans un esprit libre, que parmy ces ames retenues, qu’on a droit de soupçonner d’hypocrisie, mais c’est une erreur où tombe presque tout le monde, pour ce qui regarde les femmes de nostre profession, car ils pensent que la farce est l’image de nostre vie, & que nous ne faisons que représenter ce que nous pratiquons en effect, ils croient que la femme d’un de vous autres, l’est indubitablement de toute la Troupe; & s’imaginant que nous sommes un bien commun, comme le Soleil ou les Elemens, il ne s’en treuve pas un, qui ne croye avoir droit de nous faire souffrir l’importunité de ses demandes, & certes c’est bien de là que procede la plus facheuse chose, qui s’esprouve à nostre condition: car comme nos chambres tiennent des Temples, en ce qu’elles sont

---

<sup>72</sup> Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 200. In this passage, Bacilly refers specifically to “le Mouvement” of music which “s’exprime par plusieurs sortes d’agrémens de Chant.”

<sup>73</sup> See also Du Bos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, 414-415: “Quintilien qui avoit cru que sa profession d’enseigner l’art d’être éloquent, le mît dans l’obligation d’étudier les mouvemens du cœur humain, du moins autant que les regles de la grammaire, dit que l’orateur qui touche le plus, c’est celui qui se touche lui-même davantage [...] Tous les orateurs et tous les comédiens que nous avons vû réussir éminemment dans leurs professions, étoient des personnes nées avec la sensibilité dont je viens de parler. [...] Comme les femmes [i.e., les comédiennes] ont une sensibilité plus soudaine [...] plus de souplesse dans le cœur que les hommes, elles réussissent mieux que les hommes à faire ce que Quintilien exige de tous ceux qui veulent se mêler de déclamer. Elles se touchent plus facilement qu’eux des passions qu’il leur plaît d’avoir.”



ouvertes à chacun, pour un honneste homme qui nous y visite, il nous faut endurer les impertinences, de mille qui ne le sont pas [...] <sup>74</sup>

La Beau-Soleil thus accuses society of confusing theatrical fiction with reality: an actress's unseemly speech and behavior in a farce and her role as lover opposite different male actors from one play to the next should not be attributed to indecency, promiscuity, and easy virtue in her real life. Moreover, La Beau-Soleil compares the misunderstood women "de nostre profession" with women who, though more discreet and distinguished, are not necessarily more virtuous. It is significant that La Beau-Soleil voices her provocative opinions in a long-winded manner; her monologue spans a few pages. If women are generally accused of talkativeness ("une femme a peu s'imposer silence elle mesme," as the actor Belle-Fleur later remarks), the expressiveness of female stage performers is thought to be excessive and audacious.

The following anonymous engravings from the late seventeenth-century collection entitled *Intérieur d'appartements, concerts* show salonnières performing with pleasant facial expressions that seem to flatter their graceful social image more than they express their songs' passions. Perhaps their apparent serenity in these iconographic, stereotypical representations serves to signify their dignified, aristocratic status rather than to portray the art of singing as it was really practiced. However, Bacilly's claim that most salonnières avoided the representation of passion in their performances suggests that these reserved facial expressions might have corresponded with salon practice.

---

<sup>74</sup> Georges de Scudéry, *La Comédie des comédiens* (I,iii) (Paris: A. Courbé, 1635).

IMAGE NOT AVAILABLE

“Uranie chantant avec Damon” Guitare” (detail) BnF: Oa. 52, C 1011	Untitled  BnF: Oa. 52, C1012	“Dame de Qualité jouant de la  BnF: Oa. 52, C 1019
---	------------------------------------	--

**Figure 4**

In his treatise on the art of singing, Bacilly claims that salonnières refuse to represent specifically “la *Tendresse*” through ornaments known as “les agréments du Chant.” They are delicate vocal embellishments, usually indicated in a score with a cross above or alongside the note to be embellished. The same score can yield different performances, for the choice of ornament at each occurrence is left to the singer. Jean Rousseau’s *Traité de la viole*, in which instrumental ornamentation is said to imitate vocal ornamentation,<sup>75</sup> describes “agréments” appropriate for “des Chants languissans” and “les Airs tendres et languissans” (“air” referring to “song” and not to a person’s demeanor as in Scudéry’s “Conversation de l’*air galant*”). These ornaments are supposed to render one’s performance “fort touchant & patetique.”<sup>76</sup> The meaning of “la tendresse” and “air tendre” is somewhat ambiguous in seventeenth-century salon and musical contexts. “La tendresse” in music refers to amorous passion that is paradoxically strong and soft. Rousseau systematically associates the adjectives “tendre,”

<sup>75</sup> Rousseau, *Traité de la viole* (Paris: Christophe Ballard, 1687), 74-75: “[...] il faut pratiquer les Agréments dans les Airs & les Pieces avec Ordre & avec Regles, & comme la Voix les pratique parfaitement, c’est sur ce modelle que les Instruments se doivent conformer, particulièrement la Viole, qui imite mieux la Voix qu’aucun autre.”

<sup>76</sup> Rousseau, *Traité de la viole*, 101-106.

“languissant,” “patetique,” and “touchant” in his musical treatise. The lyricist Pierre

Perrin insists that beautiful song not only “touch” the heart of the listener, but “soften” it:

[...] j’ay taché de faire mon discours de musique beau, propre au chant et pathetique: et dans cette veüe j’en ay toujours choisy la matiere dans les passions tendres, qui touchent le cœur par sympathie d’une passion pareille, d’amour ou de hayne, de crainte ou de desir, de colère, de pitié, de merveille, &c. et j’en ay banny tous les raisonnemens serieux et quy se font dans la froideur, et mesme les passions graves, causes par des sujets serieux, qui touchent le cœur sans l’attendrir.<sup>77</sup>

This musical signification of “la tendresse” persists well into the eighteenth century. In the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie* of 1762, it is written that “en Musique, on appelle Un air tendre, Un air touchant & passionné.” In the fourth chapter of his treatise *Von der Musikalischen Poesie* (1752), Christian Gottfried Krause maintains that music best expresses emotions that are tender and touching (*rührend*) (e.g., joy, hope, love, sadness, pain, and longing), but not violent (e.g., terror, despair, rage).<sup>78</sup> However, “la tendresse” in a non-musical salon context does not refer to the same passion. The *Dictionnaire de l’Académie* of 1694 specifies that “la tendresse” can refer to a “sensibilité à l’amitié, ou à l’amour,” and Scudéry is famous for exploiting the ambiguity between friendship and love, between compassion and passion, in her ideals of “la tendresse” and gallantry in salon sociability. When Bacilly claims that salonnières refuse to represent “la tendresse” through “les agrémens du Chant,” he is not referring to Scudéry’s polite social ideal, but rather to the tender passion of love, intense though not violent. Their reticence in the name of feminine virtue is also explained by the terminology and musical effects associated with “les agrémens du Chant,” evocative of sensual pleasure and excitation:

Les Plaintes ou Accens; certaines *Langueurs* qui se font en descendant d’une longue sur une autre, sans appuyer du gosier que fort legerement; le *Tremblement* étouffé, mesme la *Cadence fort lente*, & sur tout les demy-Ports de Voix qui se font en montant par degrez imperceptibles; certaines

<sup>77</sup> Perrin, *Recueil de poésies de M. Perrin*, viii.

<sup>78</sup> This aspect of Krause’s text is studied in detail by Edward Lippman in *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 72-77.

Prononciations particulieres au Chant & à la Declamation, comme celle de l'*M* capitale [...] *que l'on suspend* avant que de la jeter sur la voyelle suivante [...] tous ces ornemens, dis-je, font un grand effet pour les Expressions tendres.<sup>79</sup>

The ornaments enumerated by Bacilly are melodic flourishes, except for the prolonged pronunciation of the consonant [M] at the beginning of a word. This pronunciation calls attention to its own sensual sonority, resembling that of a long, pleasurable kiss. The danger of performing these “agrémens du Chant” lies in the possibility that they transcend the representation of musical or textual affects and are interpreted as immodest, visceral outpourings from the performer herself.

Figure 5 presents the vocal line of the air “Mes yeux, mes tristes yeux,” in which the “les agrémens du Chant” represent flowing tears and various manifestations of anguish. These features are indicated through both customary crosses and notated melismas. The notated melismas are not merely madrigalisms illustrating the “mille torrents de larmes,” but emotional outpourings. These ornaments, obligatory because they appear in the score, demand remarkable vocal technique and emotional intensity on the part of the singer. More commonly though, “les agrémens du Chant” were not notated within the melody.<sup>80</sup> They were inserted at will according to the singer’s artistic taste, technical ability, and moral discretion.

---

<sup>79</sup> Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 201. Emphasis mine.

<sup>80</sup> Rousseau, *Traité de la viole*, 74: “Les Agrémens sont à la Voix & aux Instruments ce que les Ornaments sont à un Edifice [...] les ornements ne sont pas necessaires pour la subsistance du Bastiment, mais [...] servent seulement à le rendre plus agreable à la veuë [...]”

**“Mes yeux, mes tristes yeux” for voice and lute**  
**Anonymous**  
**from *Livre d’airs de différents auteurs* (Paris: Ballard, 1681), No. 14**

IMAGE NOT AVAILABLE

### Figure 5

If salonnières refused to insert “les agrémens du Chant” in their performance because they offended “la modestie du sexe,” they might have chosen to ornament their melodies with “cute,” little frills instead. The character Eulalie in de Pure’s *La Prétieuse* refers to such ornaments as the “mignardises d’un air,”<sup>81</sup> and Bacilly evokes the action of “mignarder le Chant” through “mille délicatesses.”<sup>82</sup> These “mignardises” seem to have been distinct from the more passionate “agrémens.” They were intended to evoke nothing but their innocent, playful, and pretty form. None of the French seventeenth-

---

<sup>81</sup> De Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 2:182.

<sup>82</sup> Bacilly, “Réponse à la Critique,” 12-13.

century treatises on or related to singing distinguish between “agrémens” and “mignardises” in musical ornamentation.<sup>83</sup> However, several seventeenth-century sources attest to two distinct manners of singing about love in the salon: one more passionate and the other more playful.

As we have seen, Bacilly criticizes most salonnières for robbing their performances of passion by suppressing “les agrémens du Chant.” At the same time, he realizes that few people are capable of such intense musical expression. He thus acknowledges two types of singing in the salon, corresponding with two vocal types and even two personality types. There are singers “qui affectent plus de poids & de solidité” appropriate for pieces that are “tristes [...] ou serieuses, et qui demandent beaucoup d’expression.” These salonnières tend to be “Melancoliques, & aux Voix plus fortes.” Most salonnières, on the other hand, “affectent une legereté dans le Chant,” “ce qui s’appelle *le tour galant*,” appropriate for pieces that are “gayes” or “galantes.” These salonnières tend to be “des Personnes enjouées, & aux Voix delicates.”<sup>84</sup> Strength of voice is associated with a serious personality and passionate expression through “les agrémens du Chant,” whereas vocal delicateness is associated with a playful personality and “le tour galant” through “les mignardises d’un Air.” “Le tour galant” in a musical air according to Bacilly thus corresponds with the “air galant” in a salonnière’s social

---


<sup>83</sup> Only three French treatises entirely devoted to the art of singing in the salon were published in the seventeenth century: Bénigne de Bacilly’s *Remarques curieuses sur l’art de bien chanter*, Jean Millet’s *La Belle méthode ou l’Art de bien chanter*, and Guillaume Gabriel Nivers’s *Méthode facile pour apprendre à chanter la musique*. Other seventeenth-century treatises address in part the art of singing and vocal ornamentation, such as Marin Mersenne’s *Harmonie universelle* (1627) (Paris: Fayard, 2003) and Étienne Loulié’s *Element ou Principes de musique* (Paris: Christophe Balard, 1696). However, none of these treatises refer to ornamentation corresponding with “les mignardises d’un air.”

<sup>84</sup> Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 15.

comportment according to Scudéry, namely a manner that is light, playful, and almost indifferent to passion in the interest of feminine virtue.

It should be noted that ladies were not alone in affecting “le tour galant” in salon performance. The musical air in Figure 6, which I have transcribed into modern notation, is for tenor voice. The flippancy of the text and the playful melodic jumps, spritely dotted rhythms, and “mignardises” throughout the melody suggest a libertine flirtatiousness that refuses to take love seriously:

"Que vostre humeur se plaise au changement"  
by Et. Moulinié, text by J. de Bouillon  
from *Airs de différents auteurs à deux parties*, Livre I (Paris: Robert Ballard, 1658)



Que vostre hu-meur se plaise au chan-ge-ment, Que le<sup>+</sup> pre-mier a-mant vous  
5 pui-ssé<sup>3</sup> con-que-rir & vous rendre a-sser-vi<sup>+</sup> e, Que tout vos-tre  
10 plais-sir soit de-man-quer de foy; Je n'en mu-tu<sup>+</sup>-re point, Sil-vie,  
15 Vous ne se-rez ja-mais si vo-la-ge<sup>+</sup> que moy.

Figure 6

Despite Bacilly's willingness to acknowledge “le tour galant” in salon singing, undoubtedly motivated by his strategic desire to please as wide and diverse a salonier readership as possible, he clearly regrets the affective blandness of this mainstream style of singing “tout à fait inanimé.” He seems to disapprove of the feminine tendency to produce a modest performance, that is, a mediocre one, for the sake of propriety. Méré concurs that this type of singing leaves him unmoved:

[...] ceux qui savent que la legereté de la voix est propre à chanter galamment mais qu'elle ne fait ni pleurer ni soupirer, ne peuvent-ils pas conclure, que les manieres delicates qui sont bien reçûes

dans la galanterie, ne réussiroient pas dans les sujets, où l'on veut toucher sensiblement, et qu'il faut chercher des expressions plus fortes et plus vives?<sup>85</sup>

These singers attenuate the affective intensity of their performance in the interest of “la modestie du sexe,” but at the price of artistic value.

It is important to note that the above sources attesting to feminine modesty in salon performance are authored by men. In these musical treatises, theoretical writings on sociability, and iconographic depictions, emphasis is made on feminine self-restraint in the artistic representation of passion, and this moderation can lead to mediocrity. Seventeenth-century sources by women, on the other hand, paint an entirely different picture: the salonnières in these latter portrayals are generally admired for their unabashedly passionate performances. The choice between self-restraint and artistic freedom may very well depend on the gendered perspective of the source.

Scudéry, the same writer who insists on the absence of passion in the social comportment of salonnières, ironically maintains that passion is commendable in their singing performances. The characters in Scudéry's salon fictions generally prefer the musical performance of an *air passionné* over that of an *air galant*.<sup>86</sup> In the

---

<sup>85</sup> Méré, “Discours IV: De la Délicatesse dans les choses,” 3:134.

<sup>86</sup> It is important to recognize that the distinction between the *air passionné* (or *air tendre*) and the *air galant* in a seventeenth-century French salon context does not necessarily anticipate the development and theorization of the *style galant* in eighteenth-century Germany, notably by Johann Mattheson, Christian Gottfried Krause, and Johann Joachim Quantz. This latter style generally emphasized clarity and tender passion in sung melody, which could be both performed and appreciated by the enlightened amateur, over complication and erudition in contrapuntal harmony, as exemplified by the music of J. S. Bach. According to David A. Sheldon, “As a cultural phenomenon [...] the *galant* movement must be viewed basically as the influence of French taste and reason on German tradition.” However, the *air galant* of seventeenth-century France and the *style galant* of eighteenth-century Germany differ significantly with regard to theatrical performance. Whereas the seventeenth-century *air galant* distinguishes itself clearly from the theatrical intensity of the *air passionné*, the eighteenth-century *style galant* identifies itself strongly with the theatrical representation of passion, as opposed to the academic coldness of fugal church music. See Edward Lippman, *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics*, 59-82 and David A. Sheldon, “The concept of galant in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.”



“Conversation du mensonge,” Amilcar jokingly says of *airs passionnés*, “ostez des Chansons passionnées les soupirs, les larmes & les, hélas! je meurs, de tous ces Amants qui ne meurent point, & qui ne veulent pas seulement estre malades, elles ne toucheront point du tout.”<sup>87</sup> In the “Conversation de l’Histoire de la poésie française,” the young lady Theodore, too timid to sing an *air passionné*, proposes to sing an air “d’un tour galant” which she qualifies as a mere “demi-déclaration d’amour.”<sup>88</sup> Theodore’s modesty may be due to the presence of the duc de Béjar who would interpret her performance of an *air passionné* as a “déclaration d’amour” addressed to him. However, she also claims that she does not sing well enough in order to do justice to an *air passionné*. Thus in addition to the affective differences between the musical *air passionné* and *air galant*, it appears that the former draws the listener’s attention more to excellence of execution than to vocal cuteness. Noromate in “Les Jeux servant de preface à *Mathilde*” by Scudéry is thus said to sing “deux airs passionnez presque aussi bien qu’on peut chanter.”<sup>89</sup> Again in the “Conversation de l’Histoire de la poésie française,” Jacinte sings an *air passionné* “admirablement” and is complimented by the circle on “sa manière de chanter.” The description of Clarinte’s singing in the novel *La Clélie*, cited in my first chapter, suggests that salonniers with small voices are nonetheless capable of passionate, “very good” singing: “une voix douce, juste et charmante [...] quoy qu’elle chante d’une manière passionnée et qu’on peut effectivement dire qu’elle chante fort bien, elle chante pourtant en personne de condition,

---

<sup>87</sup> Scudéry, “Conversation du mensonge” in *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets*, 1:447.

<sup>88</sup> Scudéry, “Conversation de l’Histoire de la poésie française” in “*De l’air galant*” et autres *Conversations*, 287.

<sup>89</sup> Scudéry, “Les Jeux servant de preface à *Mathilde*,” 12.

c'est-à-dire sans y mettre son honneur, sans s'en faire prier & sans façon [...]”<sup>90</sup> Singing “d’une manière passionné” was equivalent to singing “fort bien,” and this manner was normally attributed to professional performers of lesser (more modest) “condition.” The comparison between amateur and professional performances was inevitable in the later seventeenth century, when salonnières also performed *airs passionnés* extracted from operas.<sup>91</sup>

Scudéry’s description of Clarinte’s singing suggests that it was possible to be simultaneously involved in one’s performance and detached from it, to freely manifest passion through art without implicating one’s social sense of modesty. Scudéry defines performing “en personne de condition” as “sans y mettre son honneur, sans s’en faire prier & sans façon.” The same description could apply to Cleante’s comical acting performance studied earlier. The aristocratic performer does not allow social considerations or apprehensions to get in the way of her art; she performs “sans façon.” Both she and the professional performer are free to manifest passion, but unlike the professional, the salonnière does not allow “son honneur” to get caught up in the performance. Whereas Castiglione’s concept of *la sprezzatura* associates feigned detachment and artistic moderation, true artistic freedom in Scudéry’s view is only possible through genuine detachment. This detachment is social, not affective as Diderot would later argue, and it facilitates emotional involvement in one’s performance. Thus

---

<sup>90</sup> Scudéry, *La Clélie, histoire romaine*. 3<sup>ème</sup> partie (Paris: Augustin Courbé, 1657), 1330.

<sup>91</sup> See Goulet, *Paroles de Musique: catalogue des “Livres d’airs de différents auteurs” publiés chez Ballard* (Wavre: Mardaga, 2007), 16: “Les publications conjointes d’airs sérieux, d’airs à boire et d’airs d’opéra, à partir des années 1690, témoignent également de la parenté qui les liait dans l’esprit des contemporains; on citera à titre d’exemple le *Livre d’airs de différents auteurs* que Christophe Ballard publie en 1689, qui contient quatre airs issus de l’opéra *Orontée* de Paolo Lorenzani et Michel Leclerc.” Goulet asserts that opera in France developed during the seventeenth century from the musical culture of the salons. See *Paroles de Musique*, 16-18.

there exists an important discrepancy between Bacilly's and Scudéry's accounts of musical performances by salonnières: whereas Bacilly claims that the representation of passion is rare and problematic, Scudéry suggests that it is commonplace and commendable. Both sources appear to be reliable, so it is difficult to determine which portrayal is more representative of salon culture. Perhaps they reveal different facets of that culture, different attitudes among salonnières toward the practice of representing passion.

Scudéry presents the character Clarinte as a flattering literary portrait of Madame de Sévigné. The *Correspondance* of Sévigné herself also suggests that salonnières were free to engage in dramatic performances of passion. With what modesty Sévigné evokes her talent as a tragedian in the following lines to her daughter: "La comédie de Racine m'a paru belle, nous y avons été. Ma belle-fille<sup>92</sup> m'a paru la plus merveilleuse comédienne que j'aie jamais vue: elle surpasse la Desoeillets de cent lieues loin; *et moi, qu'on croit assez bonne pour le théâtre*, je ne suis pas digne d'allumer les chandelles quand elle paraît."<sup>93</sup> In another letter to her daughter, Sévigné recalls a passionate salon performance by her friends: "Madame de Coulanges et Monsieur de Barrillon jouèrent hier la scène de Vardes et de Mademoiselle de Toiras. Nous avions tous envie de pleurer; ils se surpassèrent eux-mêmes."<sup>94</sup> The "scene" in question is not from a play, but a well-known encounter between two real lovers whom Sévigné and her daughter knew personally: Louise de Toiras, daughter of the governor of Montpellier, and the marquis de

---

<sup>92</sup> Sévigné is speaking of Champmeslé, with whom her son Charles de Sévigné has an affair, hence the term "belle-fille."

<sup>93</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 1:417. Emphasis mine.

<sup>94</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 1:468-469.

Vardes, François du Bec-Crespin, a famous womanizer who seduced Toiras and then left her inconsolably heartbroken. When Madame de Coulanges and Monsieur de Barrillon enact a final encounter between Vardes and Toiras, they are said to surpass themselves in their representation of such pathos. Immediately after describing her friends' enactment, Sévigné praises the legendary stage actress Champmeslé in her letter, as if Coulanges's performance reminded her of Champmeslé's. Coulanges and Barrillon succeed in rendering the real-life lovers larger than life, like tragic characters in a play.

In his *Nouveau recueil des pièces les plus agréables de ce temps*, Sorel exploits the ambiguous implications of performed passion on feminine virtue. He portrays a salon circle engaged in various pastimes including games, readings, and enactments, and Sorel encourages his readers to imitate his characters. However, the character Bellinde decides that one particular scene pushes play acting too far for her sense of propriety: "La Ruelle mal assortie."

This dialogue represents a dashing young Gascon with very little intelligence and a very intelligent lady Uranie who is frustrated by his lack of social grace, but cannot help being attracted by his physical beauty. Uranie complains of his stupidity and his inability to carry on an interesting conversation, to which he awkwardly responds in a comical accent that inverts the [v] and [b] consonants. Because the Gascon is incapable of courting with customary gallantry, Uranie is forced to dictate a long, passionate discourse for him to repeat. His recitation is fraught with comical errors: the original passage "Suis-je pas cet adorateur de vos graces, qui ne respire que vostre nom, & qui estant en action perpetuelle de desirer ce que je vois [...] suis ravy de tant de merveilles que je ne sçay lequel eslire?" is transformed into "Suis-je pas cet adorateur de bos Dieu

graces, qui empire vostre renom en perpetuel desirer ce que je bois [...] qui ravy de merbeilles né say le quel lire?”<sup>95</sup> Eventually, Uranie gives up trying to educate her companion and invites him to kiss her. Her verbalized reactions enable us to deduce his silent actions. The scene becomes unmistakably, shamelessly erotic:

Recherchons d’entre un nombre infiny de baisers celui qui sera le plus savoureux pour le continuer. O qu’ils sont doux & bien assaisonez. Cela me ravit, & il n’y a si petite partie en moy qui n’y participe, & où ne furette & n’arive quelque petite étincelle de volupté, mais il en faut mourir: j’en suis toute esmeuë, & en rougis jusques dans les cheveux. Ha, vous excédez vostre permission [...] Ha! J’en suis hors d’haleine, je ne m’en puis ravoir [...]

<sup>96</sup>

The dialogue ends with Uranie’s realization that pleasurable speech is not as important as pleasurable action.

In the fictional context of the *Nouveau recueil des pieces les plus agreables de ce temps*, “La Ruelle mal assortie” is performed by the salonnières Bellinde and Dorilas. Dorilas is only too happy to impersonate the Gascon accent, which he happens to do very well. Furthermore, the role of the ineloquent lover paradoxically flatters Dorilas’s gallant image. In order to perform this role, one must not only understand, but clearly represent the difference between good and bad gallantry. It is consequently implied that when Dorilas is not playing the role of the stupid Gascon, he is capable of eloquent and elegant courtship. Moreover, the performance of this dialogue would enable him to steal numerous kisses from Bellinde whom he is currently courting. Bellinde, however, is more wary of such demonstrations. She finally agrees to play along “pourveu que l’on exceptast les baisers & autres douceurs, voulant que l’on se contentast du recit, sans qu’aucune action au moins trop licencieuse y fut jointe: Toutefois Dorilas ne s’en

---

<sup>95</sup> Sorel, *Nouveau recueil*, 115-117.

<sup>96</sup> Sorel, *Nouveau recueil*, 118-119.

contentoit guere, disant que c'estoit là une Comedie imparfaite.”<sup>97</sup> It is true that the conditions imposed by Bellinde contradict the moral of the play, but if Bellinde accepted to perform it as it appears in the *Nouveau recueil des pieces les plus agreables de ce temps*, not as a recitation but as a physical enactment with passionate kisses and other such actions, her honor would suffer and the actors would appear as exhibitionists before an intimate audience just a breath away from their tête-à-tête.

Even if Bellinde is unwilling to represent the dialogue's actions, it is surprising that she accepts to recite the text, particularly the passage cited above, replete with sexual innuendos climaxing in a breathless moment of ecstasy. Sorel claims that the role of Uranie can be played by any woman in a salon setting without causing her any scandal.<sup>98</sup> In that case, a salonnière must perform this role with apparent innocence, as if unaware of its less innocent implications, in the interest of “la modestie du sexe.” Or perhaps Sorel is playing with his readers, daring them to perform a dialogue that is clearly inappropriate for salon propriety, a dialogue that should only remain on paper.

Through the foregoing study of performance practices by salonnières, it has become evident that the feminine virtue of modesty was not interpreted and observed identically throughout seventeenth-century salon society. Whether a passionate performance was shamefully provocative or tastefully expressive depended on the attitude not only of the salonnière, but of the people observing her. The complaints of Bacilly and Méré and the irony of Sorel suggest an uneasiness among seventeenth-century men regarding the moral implications of passionate performances by salonnières.

---

<sup>97</sup> Sorel, *Nouveau recueil*, 63.

<sup>98</sup> Sorel, *Nouveau recueil*, 64.

Ironically, female writers like Scudéry and Sévigné seem to have approached the same topic with fewer complexes: what mattered for them was the salonnières' artistry. When the memorialist Gédéon Tallemant des Réaux watches Marie-Catherine-Hortense des Jardins recite a sonnet of her composition in a salon gathering, he speculates that the passion in her performance implicates much more than her verses:

[...] d'ailleurs elle fait tant de contorsions quand elle recite ses vers, ce qu'elle fait devant cent personnes toutes les fois qu'on l'en prie, d'un ton si languissant & avec des yeux si mourans, que s'il y a encore quelque chose à luy apprendre en cette matière-là, ma foy! il n'y en a guères. Je n'ay jamais rien veü de moins modeste; elle ma fait baisser les yeux plus de cent fois.<sup>99</sup>

Mlle des Jardins's immodest eyes, unafraid to express themselves in an intense, passionate recitation, make Tallemant feel so embarrassed for the performer and himself that he modestly lowers his own eyes. The salonnière, on the other hand, does not see any harm in reciting this way whenever the occasion presents itself, "ce qu'elle fait devant cent personnes toutes les fois qu'on l'en prie." The performance of Mlle des Jardins is memorialized by Tallemant, whose harsh disapproval incites the reader of his *Historiettes* to judge her performance to be scandalously immodest. Still, one has to wonder: why is she invited time and time again to perform in this manner for salon gatherings? Is her lack of inhibition regarded as a brazen and therefore amusing oddity? Or is Tallemant more austere than his contemporaries with regard to the artistic representation of passion by salonnières? I cannot provide a definitive answer to these questions; the purpose of this section has been to ask them in the first place, to interrogate the stereotypical image of feminine modesty currently associated with salon sociability in the seventeenth century.

---

<sup>99</sup> Tallemant des Réaux, *Historiettes*, 2:901.

During that period, the artistic representation of passion was associated with the professional stage. Whereas Bacilly, Méré, and Sorel considered this association to be dangerous for “la modestie du sexe,” Scudéry and Sévigné interpreted it to mean excellence in performance. Whether approached with circumspection, modesty, or emulation, the imitation of stage artists by salonnières was an important means by which the theater, with its ambivalent implications, was introduced into respectable salon culture.

As this chapter has demonstrated, performance art in a salon setting attracted a variety of approaches and interpretations. Since they concerned the performer’s sense of dignity, generosity, and modesty, these fundamental social values also seem to have been subject to interpretation. If salonnières were particularly wary of the manifestation of passion, demonstrations of physical humor, and unattractive malice underlying mockery, all of which were commonly attributed to stage artists, they did not systematically avoid such performances. Buffoonery was not necessarily harmful to one’s dignity; by freely representing the silliness of a character, one could demonstrate both talent and self-assurance. Mockery through words or physical demonstration could spare the performer’s social and moral image if presented as an “occasion frivole” born of the performer’s self-acknowledged “imperfections humaines.” The representation of passion through “les agréments du Chant” did not necessarily constitute an immodest emotional exhibition; it was revelatory of artistic talent and sentimental depth. By acknowledging this open-endedness in the performance culture of the salon, one uncovers the dynamic equilibrium that existed between art and politesse, between free expression and prudent self-restraint.



### 3. Performance Arts that Hide Themselves

As my first two chapters have shown, artistic performances could entail social risks in a salon setting: the risk of appearing affected, undignified, malicious, or immodest. Salonnières were nevertheless expected to use their performances to demonstrate their natural talent, cultivated skills, impeccable taste, and sound judgment as enlightened amateur artists, distinct from professionals. The balancing act of excellence and ease was just as essential to the art of conversation. Salonnières were expected to speak well, demonstrating good pronunciation, tasteful word choice, judgment, promptness, wit, etc., without appearing to try to speak well. Unlike other salon performance arts, that of conversation was not openly acknowledged as a concerted performance, though each interlocutor undoubtedly approached it in this manner. More than voiced reading, singing, dramatic acting, and impersonation, the art of conversation aspired toward naturalness.

But how was naturalness experienced, perceived, and represented in seventeenth-century salon culture? By asking this question, I am not seeking to define “nature” or “human nature,” or to compare the philosophical ideas of “nature” and “art,” questions which have occupied philosophers since antiquity. Rather, I am interested in what acting or behaving “naturally” meant in the salon. Many historians of salon culture maintain that this comportment was just a façade, a mask that dissimulated a reality of self-constraint. I posit, however, that it was possible in the eyes of seventeenth-century theorists of sociability to reconcile acting naturally and being natural, etiquette and emotion. At the same time, also contrary to what is generally presumed, I believe that salon sociability was not strictly defined by apparent naturalness: gallantry, which

mediated the rapport between the sexes, was an openly artificial social performance. The first part of the present chapter thus interrogates the myth of apparent naturalness that is currently attributed to seventeenth-century salon culture. Naturalness was not necessarily a pretense, nor was it always necessary in this culture; on the one hand, it could be genuine, and on the other hand, it could give way to unnatural forms of civility.

In the second part of this chapter, I will turn to the salon performance arts of poetic recitation by memory and impromptu. A study of these practices vis-à-vis that of conversation will bring to the forefront a quality of naturalness essential to salon interaction: spontaneity. In theory, the arts of conversation, poetic recitation, and impromptu called for spontaneity of speech, recollection, and composition, respectively. In reality, the quality of spontaneity varied from one salonnier to another and from one salon activity to another. I will study the manner in which spontaneity was experienced, represented, and occasionally feigned through these salon practices. The image of spontaneity and effortlessness distinguished salon performance from theatrical performance commonly associated with dramatic authors laboring long hours over their texts and with actors whose performances were openly acknowledged as the fruit of rehearsal.

### ***Social Grace: Innate or Acquired?***

In many seventeenth-century sources describing or prescribing behavior at court, the courtier was depicted as an actor playing an artificial role or wearing a mask, and this performance varied according to one's immediate social context (i.e., the personalities, emotional states, and preoccupations of one's interlocutors, the degree of respect and/or familiarity deemed appropriate). The court was synonymous with ambition, greed, and

power acquired by courting those in power. It was therefore also synonymous with duplicity, hypocrisy, and artifice. Though salon culture was defined by the art of conversation among “friends,” it often involved similar political and social strategies between interlocutors of different standing under the guise of leisurely chatting, whether the circle was formed in a private residence or at court. Thus purely “natural” behavior is commonly judged among historians of seventeenth-century sociability to have been impossible in any situation.

The Jesuit priest and writer Baltasar Gracián offers a vision of social interaction based on dissimulation in *L’Homme de cour*: “Celui, qui montre son jeu, risque de perdre [...] Si tu n’es pas chaste, dit le Proverbe, fais semblant de l’être [...] Entre sous le voile de l’intérêt d’autrui, pour rencontrer après le sien [...] Ne point mentir, mais ne pas dire toutes les vérités [...] Il faut autant d’adresse, pour savoir la dire, que pour savoir la taire.”<sup>1</sup> Gracián is writing as an ambitious social strategist. The Jansenist moralist Jean de La Bruyère more disdainfully offers the same vision: “Un homme qui sait la cour est maître de son geste, de ses yeux & de son visage; il est profond, impénétrable; il dissimule les mauvais offices, sourit à ses ennemis, contraint son humeur, déguise ses passions, dément son cœur, parle, agit contre ses sentiments.”<sup>2</sup> Social interaction is recognized as a necessity for social promotion, to the detriment of one’s real nature (“son humeur,” “ses passions,” “son cœur,” “ses sentiments”).

Though most early modern theorists of sociability emphasized the need to polish one’s social image and to perform a role in front of others, certain writers expressed a

---

<sup>1</sup> Gracián, *L’Homme de cour*, 94, 102, 133, 155, 192, 223.

<sup>2</sup> La Bruyère, *Les Caractères*, 202.

belief in authenticity and naturalness, real and not feigned,<sup>3</sup> in salon interaction.

According to Baldassare Castiglione, the ability to speak well in conversation is associated with a certain natural “grace” that can be enhanced through the observation and imitation of those who converse in an exemplary fashion. As Messer Cesare Gonzaga tells the Count Lodovico da Canossa in Book I of *Il Libro del Cortegiano* “per la forza del vocabulo si può dir, che chi ha grazia, quello è grato; ma perchè voi diceste, questo spesse volte esser don della natura, e de’ cieli: ed ancor quando non è così perfetto, potersi con studio, e fatica far molto maggiore,” to which the Count responds:

dico, che chi ha da esser aggratiato [...] presuppendo prima che da natura non sia inhabile, die cominciar per tempo: & imparar i principii da ottimi maestri [...] E come la peccia ne’ verdi prati sempre tra l’herbe va carpendo i fiori, così il nostro Cortegiano haverà da rubare questa gratia da quel, che a lui parerà che la tenghino, e da ciascun quella parte che più sarà laudevole.<sup>4</sup>

According to the Count, the art of conversation is not a vain performance; it is based on a natural predisposition cultivated through study and effort. In *L’Honneste homme*, Nicolas Faret polarizes the distinction between natural gift and concerted effort in the art of conversation. He praises “une certaine grace naturelle, qui en tous ses exercices, & jusques à ses moindres actions doit reluire comme un petit rayon de Divinité, qui se voit en tous ceux qui sont nays pour plaire dans le monde.” This quality known as *l’honnêteté* either exists naturally in an exalted state or does not exist at all. Those without this “sublime don de nature” can endeavor to “reparer ce manquement” by imitating those with it, but any effort to resemble another can never equal an innate grace in

---

<sup>3</sup> Liti, *Le monde des salons*, 284: “Le naturel mondain est un art qui nécessite un important travail sur soi, de manière à mieux maîtriser les effets que l’on produit sur les autres. Il n’a rien de spontané. Il est le résultat de tout un apprentissage du monde, des gestes, des attitudes et des paroles.”

<sup>4</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 61-65.

conversation.<sup>5</sup> In his *Nouveau traité de la civilité qui se pratique en France parmi les honnestes gens*, Antoine de Courtin shares Faret's opinion regarding the haves and have-not's of natural social grace:

[...] cette politesse dont vous me demandez des regles, n'est à mon avis, que la modestie & l'honnêteté que chacun doit garder selon sa condition. Car il n'est pas question, ce me semble, de la bonne grace ou d'un certain air & attrait, qui est comme naturel dans les actions de certaines personnes, lesquelles ont un talent particulier de la nature pour plaire en tout ce qu'elles font, & pour ne déplaire jamais quoy quelles fassent. On ne peut donner de préceptes pour acquérir cet air & cet agrément; puisque c'est une pure liberalité de la nature, que l'on exprime par ce mot, *gaudeant benè nati*.<sup>6</sup>

Other seventeenth-century French theorists agree with Castiglione that the art of conversation implies a natural disposition cultivated through the persistent practice and imitation of one's best interlocutors. Ortigue de Vaumorière maintains that the cultivation of one's true nature into one's social character is based on the process of imitation:

C'est un grand avantage que d'avoir l'Air galant, mais c'est un avantage que l'on ne peut acquérir qu'imparfaitement par les soins que l'on se donne. Il faut que la nature le commence en nous, & que nous cultivions ensuite ces dispositions favorables. Nous pouvons les polir & les perfectionner par la fréquentation des Personnes qui ont déjà cet Air, si nous les imitons dans l'entretien et dans les manières.<sup>7</sup>

Imitating a person of exemplary elegance is not falsifying one's own nature; imitation is the natural consequence of the affinity developed for the people with whom one is in contact. Far from straining oneself or affecting unnatural behavior, one should imitate people with "une action libre & aisée." One can thereby develop "je ne sai quel agrément que l'on n'acquiert qu'avec les personnes qui l'ont déjà."<sup>8</sup> In order to learn the art of

---

<sup>5</sup> Faret, *L'Honneste homme*, 32-33.

<sup>6</sup> Courtin, *Nouveau Traité de la civilité*, 2-3.

<sup>7</sup> Ortigue de Vaumorière, *L'art de plaire dans la conversation*, 241.

<sup>8</sup> Ortigue de Vaumorière, *L'art de plaire dans la conversation*, 12.

conversation, the process of imitation is not necessarily a deliberate, voluntary one, according to Antoine Gombault, chevalier de Méré:

Mais s'il y a quelque chose, où le soin de s'instruire sous les meilleurs Maîtres soit nécessaire, c'est la Conversation [...] Il y a un petit nombre de personnes qui se prennent si bien à toutes les actions de la vie, et qui parlent de si bon air, que pour se rendre honneste homme et de bonne compagnie, il vaudroit mieux les observer et les entretenir de temps en temps.<sup>9</sup>

Méré only insists on interaction and observation; imitation follows involuntarily and therefore unaffectedly. It is a gradual, effortless transformation of an already receptive nature. It is only through socialization that one has the opportunity to imitate, and it is only through the imitation of others that one can fully realize the beauty of one's natural disposition.

Is this predisposition for conversation, this "je ne sai quel agrément," this "grazia di natura" considered the quintessential mark of nobility? The Count in Castiglione's dialogue insists on the ideal courtier's real nobility, as opposed to the feigned nobility of imposters, but another interlocutor Gasparo is quick to point out that social grace is not necessarily restricted to noblemen, nor are all noblemen graceful.<sup>10</sup> Faret implicitly associates the absence of natural social grace and modest social class:

La bonne education y sert encore de beaucoup: Car comme il s'est veu quelquesfois de jeunes Lyons quitter leur instinct farouche, & se rendre familiers parmy les hommes; de mesme il arrive assez souvent que des personnes *d'une naissance ingrate*, ont sceu si bien vaincre leurs deffauts avecques des soins extraordinaires, qu'ils font toutes choses par un effort de raison, aussi agreablement que les autres par la seule bonté de leur naturel. Mais que ceux-là sont heureux qui n'ont que faire d'enseignements pour plaire; & qui ont esté comme arrousez du Ciel de cette grace qui ravit les yeux & les cœurs de tout le monde!<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Méré, "Discours de la Conversation," 3:111.

<sup>10</sup> Castiglione, *Le parfait courtisan*, 39.

<sup>11</sup> Faret, *L'Honneste homme*, 33-34. Emphasis mine.

In Méré's writings, one occasionally finds expressions that seem to associate nobility and natural grace (e.g., "l'air noble & naturel"<sup>12</sup>); however his concept of *honnêteté* is not class-specific:

J'ai quelquefois vû disputer, si cette qualité si rare vient principalement d'une heureuse naissance, ou d'une excellente education; et je croi, que pour l'acquérir en perfection, il est nécessaire que la nature y contribue, et que l'art, comme part-tout ailleurs, acheve ce qu'elle a commencé: Il faut que le cœur soit noble, et l'esprit docile, et les mettre ensuite dans les bonnes voies.<sup>13</sup>

Méré thus attributes *l'honnêteté* not to an excellent upbringing accessible only to the nobility, but to a noble heart that nature can impart to anyone. According to Méré, natural social grace is independent of social standing, and it can be cultivated through the imitation of those who have already developed this grace into a consummate art.

Many theorists of sociability during the seventeenth century asserted that natural social grace was only possible when one remained true to one's nature. According to Méré, "la principale cause de la bienséance vient de ce que nous faisons comme il faut ce qui nous est naturel."<sup>14</sup> Courtin similarly maintains that the codes of social propriety are dictated by "nature" itself, understood as both universal and individual:

[...] des regles de la bienséance que la nature même nous a prescrites [...] Par exemple, elle nous a tellement obligé de nous conduire selon les talens qu'elle nous a donnez, que si nous prétendons sortir de ces bornes & nous contrefaire, soit dans la parole, soit dans l'action, comme il arrive à plusieurs qui se font la voix languissante, ou la langue grasse, & qui affectent un certain marcher, & des gestes qu'ils n'ont point de la nature, la contrainte et l'irregularité paroissent aussi-tôt [...] une indecence qui rebute et qui choque.<sup>15</sup>

Courtin advises salonniers to remain true to their own nature, though this nature is to be polished and perfected. Civility is a virtue equidistant from the two extremes of rusticity and affectation, from brute nature and sheer artifice. This golden medium manifests itself

---

<sup>12</sup> Méré, "Discours de la Conversation," 2:106.

<sup>13</sup> Méré, "Discours premier: De la vraie Honnêteté," 3:70.

<sup>14</sup> Méré, "Discours des Agrémens," 2:19.

<sup>15</sup> Courtin, *Nouveau traité de la civilité*, 14, 15.

in the way one speaks and walks: “un marcher modeste, ne frapant point fortement le plancher, ou la terre, ne traînant point les pieds, ne marchant point comme si on dansait, ne marquant point la cadence de la teste, ou des mains; mais se retenant en soy-mesme & marchant doucement sans tourner la veuë çà & là.”<sup>16</sup> As the abundance of proscriptions suggests (“ne frapant point [...] ne traînant point [...] ne marchant point [...] ne marquant point [...] se retenant [...] sans tourner”), the coveted quality of naturalness is frequently defined negatively vis-à-vis that of affectation, which is much easier to identify, describe, and criticize. On the one hand, one must refine one’s nature without transforming it into artifice. On the other, efforts to carefully control one’s voice, appearance, and expression in salon conversation are deemed necessary for one’s nature to manifest itself freely and in the best possible light.

It was thus possible to be, and not simply perform, one’s social character without forcing or supplanting one’s true nature, according to prominent theorists of salon sociability. Historians of seventeenth-century salon culture have generally neglected this promotion of naturalness. According to Carol Houlihan Flynn, for example, conduct manuals of that period documented a “nostalgic belief in a ‘natural’ self that ‘ought’ to be in harmony with its needs and desires,” lamenting “a lost unity of body and soul [...] that could exist only in an Edenic imagination.”<sup>17</sup> This presumed schism between one’s unperformed, natural self and one’s performed social character is reinforced by more recent sociological theories, primarily those of Erving Goffman who has studied the

---

<sup>16</sup> Courtin, *Nouveau traité de la civilité*.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Berger, “The Absence of Grace,” 18. Source: “Defoe’s Idea of Conduct: Ideological Fictions and Fictional Reality” in *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays in Literature and the History of Sexuality*, ed. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, (New York: Methuen, 1987).



dramaturgical aspects of modern-day social interaction. Goffman conceives of a clear separation between one's private self and one's consciously performed social front in conformity with "institutionalized" standards and values.<sup>18</sup> One cannot expose one's real self without endangering one's status in the group: "there is hardly a legitimate everyday vocation or relationship whose performers do not engage in concealed practices which are incompatible with fostered impressions."<sup>19</sup> Eli Rozik pushes the concept of social artificiality further by denying the existence of a "natural" self. According to Rozik, the individual is defined by a set of circumstantial roles performed strategically for others: "no such duality exists in performing the various roles of any given individual. The set of roles of individuals is an essential component of their own personalities."<sup>20</sup> The current emphasis on artificiality in seventeenth-century social interaction is also probably due to a historiographical generalization of the courtier image, so striking in the writings of Gracián and La Bruyère.<sup>21</sup> However, Méré and Courtin imagined a continuum between one's nature and one's strategically constructed social character. By respecting this continuum, the salonnier could avoid affectation and instead become what Méré termed a "bon acteur" in society.

---

<sup>18</sup> Antoine Lilti cautions against the dichotomy between "private" and "public" identities in the context of salon sociability. See Lilti, *Le monde des salons*, 87: "un double mouvement de privatisation et d'institutionnalisation ne permet pas de rendre compte de la vitalité des pratiques de sociabilité [...] Ces pratiques, qui échappent à l'alternative privé/public, mettent en évidence le rôle du domicile privé et les aspects normatifs de l'interaction sociale."

<sup>19</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 64.

<sup>20</sup> Rozik, "Hedges and Boundaries," 188.

<sup>21</sup> Lilti, *Le monde des salons*, 246: "La science du monde est une science de la dissimulation, du pouvoir que confère le savoir sur les autres, et de l'empire que permet l'art de la pénétration, qui est un art du regard. Cette science n'est pas nouvelle, c'est la science du courtisan, maître de lui et dissimulateur, masquant ses sentiments et déchiffrant ceux des autres."

***“Être bon acteur”***

The comparison between the salonnier and the stage actor is most prevalent and problematic in Méré’s theoretical writings largely devoted to the description of the *honnête homme*, or “true gentleman.” Méré acted as “social advisor” (*précepteur mondain*) to Anne de Gondi, duchesse de Lesdiguières during her youth, initiating her to the subtleties of salon culture. He later published in a series of letters, discourses, and conversations his numerous teachings and reflections on the subject. When Méré refers to the ideal of the *honnête homme* in his writings, he sometimes seems to be describing a type of person who already exists in salon society and who is being cited as an example for others to observe and imitate. At other times, this figure seems to represent a social ideal uniting naturalness and excellence, as if Méré were urging his readers, caught in the games of dissimulation evoked by Gracián and La Bruyère, to change their ways and the very nature of salon sociability. Méré uses the image of the stage actor, he who represents a character other than himself, as both model and antithesis of the *honnête homme*, he who knows how to reconcile acting naturally with being natural in a salon setting.

According to the literary historian Mechthild Albert, Méré considers the *honnête homme* to be “l’acteur d’un rôle socialement conditionné qui, tout en exigeant l’accord parfait entre intérieur et extérieur, permet à l’individualité de se manifester.”<sup>22</sup> Lucie Desjardins concurs with Albert’s insistence on an “accord parfait entre intérieur et extérieur,” maintaining that a salonnier’s manifested emotion “ne saurait être créée à partir de rien [...] il lui faut encore un mouvement de l’âme, seul capable de donner le ton

---

<sup>22</sup> Albert, “L’Éloquence du Corps,” 168.

juste à la voix & l'élan convenable au geste.”<sup>23</sup> According to Desjardins, Méré maintains that authentic feelings are artificially induced, voluntarily simulated in the salonnier's “imagination” in order to be really felt in the heart, and finally manifested through voice, face, and gesture: “En somme, les passions véritablement ressenties sont évacuées au profit de passions feintes, mais si bien intériorisées qu'elles deviennent, en quelque sorte, une véritable nature. Dans ce contexte, la feinte ou la simulation des passions est appelée à paraître sous la figure de la nature & ne doit plus être considérée comme un simple masque.”<sup>24</sup> Outward dissimulation is unnecessary, for one's inner feelings are consciously manipulated through the power of the imagination. This strategic use of the imagination to voluntarily conjure up emotions recalls the concept of *visiones* described by Quintilian in Book 6, Chapter 2 of his *Institutes of Oratory*: the orator genuinely feels the emotions he wishes to instigate in the judge, but they are the result of the voluntary manipulations of his imagination. The use of the imagination to control one's emotions is also recommended by René Descartes in his treatise *Les passions de l'âme*.<sup>25</sup> Desjardins's interpretation of Méré and of Albert's reading of Méré suggests a deeper level of dissimulation and manipulation in a social context, at the incidence of the emotions themselves.

I propose to read Méré's writings and Albert's assessment of them differently.

The “accord parfait entre intérieur et extérieur” is due rather to one's freedom *not* to

---

<sup>23</sup> Desjardins, *Le corps parlant*, 156.

<sup>24</sup> Desjardins, *Le corps parlant*, 157.

<sup>25</sup> René Descartes, *Les Passions de l'âme* (1649) in *Œuvres et Lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), 717: “Nos passions ne peuvent pas aussi directement être excitées ni ôtées par l'action de notre volonté, mais elles peuvent l'être indirectement par la représentation des choses qui ont coutume d'être jointes avec les passions que nous voulons avoir, et qui sont contraires à celles que nous voulons rejeter.”

perform artificially in a salon setting, to be oneself without having to incessantly manipulate one's appearance and feelings in front of others. Méré develops this idea when he compares the actor on stage with the "bon acteur" in society, synonymous with the *honnête homme*. Modern critics, including Desjardins, tend to assimilate these two figures in Méré's writings, interpreting "bon acteur" to mean "good actor."<sup>26</sup> Bernadette B. de Mendoza claims that Méré's *honnête homme* is characterized by "un certain détachement." He banishes all sensitivity, anticipating the artist in *Le paradoxe du comédien* by Denis Diderot, because such sensitivity "nuit à l'indépendance du gout."<sup>27</sup> However, as the above reference to Quintilian suggests, a rhetorical performance does not necessarily render incompatible the orator's experience of strong emotion (*pathos*) and his sound sense of judgment (*logos*).

For Méré, the comparison between the stage actor and the salonnier is more complex than what Mendoza suggests, as the following passage demonstrates:

Du reste, je ne vois presque point de si mal-heureux rôle, qu'on ne lui puisse donner quelque sorte d'agrément, lorsqu'on fait tout ce qui se peut pour le bien jouer: le cœur à cela n'est pas moins nécessaire que l'esprit, au moins pour l'action du monde, parce qu'elle a toujours quelque véritable sentiment, et que ce n'est pas une vaine apparence comme l'action du theatre. Celle-là pour être bonne n'a besoin que d'adresse, car ce qui se passe sur le theatre ne veut pas être réel; il n'y faut que du semblant: de sorte qu'un Comédien, qui pour représenter une passion violente, seroit effectivement touché, feroit une aussi grande faute, qu'un Peintre qui mettrait des diamants ou des perles dans ses tableaux, au lieu de les y peindre.<sup>28</sup>

The theatrical metaphor that Méré evokes with reference to social acting is, ironically, in opposition to social acting. The theatrical actor is unmoved inside when he shows himself to be moved, whereas the social actor, in order to "bien jouer" his character, must not simply put up a front, but give in to "quelque véritable sentiment." If Méré's

<sup>26</sup> Desjardins, *Le corps parlant*, 158.

<sup>27</sup> Mendoza, "L'art de vivre de l'honnête homme," 20.

<sup>28</sup> Méré, "Discours VI: Suite du Commerce du Monde," 3:158.

conception of theatrical acting anticipates Diderot's paradox, it also echoes the general conviction throughout the seventeenth century that performers only "represent" or "imitate" the actions and passions of their characters without ever feeling them.<sup>29</sup>

According to the theologian Pierre Nicole, who condemned the theater, an actor's real experience of his character's passions is reprehensible:

C'est un métier où des hommes et des femmes représentent des passions de haine, de colere, d'ambition, de vengeance et principalement d'amour. Il faut qu'ils les expriment le plus naturellement et le plus vivement qu'il leur est possible; et il ne le sauroient faire s'ils ne les excitent en quelque sorte en eux-mêmes, & si leur ame ne se les imprime, pour les exprimer exterieurement par les gestes, & par les paroles. Il faut donc que ceux qui representent une passion d'amour en soient en quelque sorte touchez pendant qu'ils la representent.<sup>30</sup>

Nicole claims that the actor's will to artificially excite these passions in himself results in his loss of control of the same passions; when he represents the passion of love, he ends up falling in love with his stage partner. He thus finds himself manipulated, possessed, even corrupted by the same emotions he is supposed to manipulate for the sake of dramatic illusion. The problem lies not only in dramatic poetry, but also in the emotional susceptibility of the actor. According to Nicole and his contemporaries, authentic emotion in stage acting constitutes a failing, a weakness, for actors are supposed to remain unmoved under their diverse masks of emotion.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> In his *Historiettes*, Tallemant des Réaux provides an infamous example of an actor, Mondory, who allowed himself to be penetrated by his character: "Ce personnage d'Hérode lui coûta bon, car, comme il avoit l'imagination forte, dans le moment il croyoit quasi être ce qu'il représentoit, et il lui tomba en jouant ce rôle une apoplexie sur la langue qui l'a empêché de jouer depuis."

<sup>30</sup> Nicole, *Traité de la comédie* (1667), ed. Georges Couton (Paris: "Les Belles Lettres," 1961), 41-42.

<sup>31</sup> The historian Sabine Chaouche explains that in the seventeenth century, the Church frequently criticized stage actors of "feeling" ("ressentir") the dramatic text. However, actors could maintain "plus de distance" from their discourses than priests. Indeed, priests had difficulty reconciling in their sermons the artifices of oratory technique with the sincerity of their faith. Chaouche posits that the virulent attacks suffered by the theatrical profession were actually a subterfuge serving to divert the public's attention from this conflict at the heart of religious predication. See Chaouche's analysis in *Sept Traités sur le jeu du comédien*, 190-193.

The expression “bon acteur” used by Méré to describe the salonnier does not refer to the Diderotian stage actor who remains level-headed and lucid regardless of the emotions he represents. Indeed, this expression does not even mean “good actor” in the theatrical sense. The word “acteur” corresponds here to the verb “agir,” which means “to act” in a real situation, as distinct from “jouer,” or “to act” in an imaginary, dramatic situation. At the same time, the real “acteur” in Méré’s writings is like a stage actor because he is judged by his outward appearance, gestures, and behavior. As Méré clearly states in his “Troisième Conversation,” “être bon acteur” means that one has a physical presence emanating grace and ease, whether in movement or at rest.<sup>32</sup> In his “Discours VI: Suite du Commerce du Monde,” this quality is said to be equally present in the tone of one’s voice.<sup>33</sup> Méré adds in his “Troisième conversation” that being a “bon acteur” is “fort nécessaire aux personnes du monde, et c’est à peu près ce qu’on appelle aujourd’hui, pour parler à la mode, avoir le bon air.”<sup>34</sup> Mendoza’s interpretation may be tempting in the following passage from the “Suite du Commerce du Monde”: “On voit que le bons Acteur pour de certains rolles ne réussissent pas sur d’autres sujets. Les esprits d’une humeur enjouée veulent toujours rire, et les autres plus serieux ne parlent que par maximes.”<sup>35</sup> However, what Méré means is that people should choose their

---

<sup>32</sup> Méré, “Troisième Conversation,” 1:42: “Quand je vins à la Cour, dit le Mareschal, on estoit persuadé que pour estre honneste homme, il ne faloit que sçavoir danser, ou courre la bague, ou quelque chose de cette nature [...] le corps en est plus libre ou plus dégagé, et que cela se connoist, quoi qu’on se tienne en repos. Vous sçavez que c’est un grand avantage que d’estre bon acteur. L’action, dit le Chevalier, est une espèce d’expression; et comme les paroles bien choisies sont agréables, quand elles expriment des choses qui plaisent, tout ce qu’on fait de la mine ou du geste est bien receu, quand on le fait de bonne grace et qu’il y paroist du merite ou de l’esprit. Mais il ne faut pas s’y tromper, on est souvent acteur de rien, comme diseur de rien [...]”

<sup>33</sup> Méré, “Discours VI: Suite du Commerce du Monde,” 3:157.

<sup>34</sup> Méré, “Troisième conversation,” 1:42.

<sup>35</sup> Méré, “Discours VI: Suite du Commerce du Monde,” 3:157.

social “characters” in accordance with their true nature, whether playful or serious, making it easier for them to have grace in front of their interlocutors.

When Méré insists that the *honnête homme* be a “bon acteur” in society, he is not requiring him to be an unfeeling actor performing a social character with feigned or forced emotions. Méré is convinced that it is difficult, if not impossible, to conceal one’s naturally occurring emotions during a social exchange. Even when listening silently, one “ne laisse pas en cet état-là de penser et d’agir intérieurement; mesme de témoigner par quelque action comme de la bouche ou des yeux, ce qui se passe au-dedans.”<sup>36</sup> The following statement best summarizes the relationship between inner feelings and outer behavior according to Méré: “pour le paroître [honnête-homme] il faut l’être en effet; car les apparences du dehors ne sont que les images des actions intérieures [...] celui qui veut avoir l’action libre & de bonne grâce n’y réussit pas, à moins que de l’avoir dans sa pensée ou dans son sentiment.”<sup>37</sup> He is always vulnerable and exposed; try as he may, he cannot fake his feelings, for his real ones always manage to surface. By the same token, in the “Discours de la Conversation,” Méré advises salonniers to “observer tout ce qui se passe dans le cœur et dans l’esprit des personnes qu’on entretient, et s’accoutumer de bonne heure à connoître les sentimens et les pensées, par des signes presque imperceptibles.” Méré contrasts this involuntary body language with the mimes of antiquity, stage actors who mastered their corporeal expression to represent the thoughts and emotions of their characters. Aware of his inevitable transparency, the *honnête*

---

<sup>36</sup> Méré, “Discours des Agrémens,” 2:14.

<sup>37</sup> Méré, “Discours V: Le Commerce du Monde,” 3:141-142.

*homme* renounces the unrealistic ambition of dissimulating or manipulating his feelings in front of others.

The key to good “acting” in society is not the control of one’s gestures, facial expressions, and words in the manner of a stage actor, but the judicious exposure of one’s naturally occurring feelings. The manifestation of emotion is not always a sign of weakness. Emotions can be used to render one’s speech and action more appealing in front of others: “Je connois des personnes qui seroient d’avis que pour estre agreable et mesme pour vivre heureusement on n’eust point de passions. [...] Mais elles sont ordinairement si bonnes, que tant s’en faut qu’on les doive retrancher, on fait bien d’en augmenter le nombre [...] il y a des passions qui donnent bon air, et qui sont à rechercher [...]”<sup>38</sup> Though Méré maintains that one’s emotions should not run wild in polite company,<sup>39</sup> he encourages the salonier to sometimes let go and spontaneously emote without inner or outer manipulations. Laughter and tears, symptoms of emotions pushed to extremes, are not necessarily discouraged in the calm of the salon, as long as the immediate discussion warrants them.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, anger does not need to be suppressed,

---

<sup>38</sup> Méré, “Discours des Agrémens,” 2:49.

<sup>39</sup> Méré, “Discours de la Conversation,” 2:103: “Il faut que les mouvements de l’ame soient modérez dans la conversation.”

<sup>40</sup> Méré, “Discours des Agrémens,” 2:16-17: “Je remarque aussi qu’il n’y a rien de plus rare dans les actions de la vie, que de rire et de pleurer de bonne grace, et que tout sied bien aux personnes qui plaisent dans l’une et dans l’autre. Car ce n’est pas rire de bonne grace de ne rire que pour montrer de belles dents. Il faut que le sujet le demande, et que le rire soit proportionné au sujet et à l’occasion [...] Pour ce qui regarde les larmes, je trouve qu’il se faut bien garder d’en répandre à contre-temps [...] il arrive assez souvent que lors qu’on pleure on ne cause point de tendresse, et que mesme on fait rire, et qu’on se rend ridicule [...] je prens garde que quelques personnes qui se piquent d’estre égales, quoy que d’ailleurs elles ne soient pas sans merite, déplaisent toujours également. En effet cette égalité fade et sans goust qui paroist dans l’humeur et dans l’esprit de quelques gens, les rend bien desagregables [...] Il seroit à souhaiter que toutes les passions que le sujet demande, se pussent sentir ou deviner sur le visage et dans l’air de ceux qui veulent plaire.”



but released and vented when triggered by a reasonable cause.<sup>41</sup> Strong emotions are admittedly exceptional in a salon setting; however, when revealed at the right moment and with the right degree of intensity, they can be used to demonstrate one's strength of character, exuberance, tenderness, etc., endowing one's social image with "bonne grace." Méré wants the salonnier's nature to manifest itself spontaneously, but selectively: "Il faut donc que le cœur ait des sentiments, et que l'esprit non seulement les conduise, mais encore qu'il en fasse le choix. Car comme il y a des pensées qui sont agréables et d'autres qui ne le sont point, cette même diversité se trouve dans les mouvemens du cœur, les uns sont bien receus, et les autres sont rebutez."<sup>42</sup> Without artificially manipulating or simulating these emotions, as Desjardins suggests, one need only "choose" properly, knowing which emotions to vent and which ones to conceal, according to one's sense of decorum.

This idea of emotional selection makes more sense in light of Méré's belief that emotions never occur in isolation, but are composite and multifaceted, and that vague sentiments can be dissected into distinct, identifiable feelings. The death of a friend, for example, might incite feelings of grief, tenderness, pity, or outrage.<sup>43</sup> Méré seems to imply that not all of these emotions would be well received in salon company, and that one must select from this mixture the appropriate emotion(s) to manifest.<sup>44</sup> The

---

<sup>41</sup> Méré, "Discours des Agrémens," 2:49: "La colere ne sied pas mal lorsqu'elle est raisonnable & proportionnée au sujet qu'on a de s'emporter. La tristesse aussi, pourveu qu'elle soit douce, & que le merite l'accompagne, peut faire de bons effets."

<sup>42</sup> Méré, "Cinquième Conversation," 1:72.

<sup>43</sup> Méré, "Discours de l'esprit," 2:81.

<sup>44</sup> Méré, "Discours de l'esprit," 2:81: "[...] puisque les mouvemens de l'ame plus ou moins nobles, font aussi des effets plus ou moins dignes de loüanges."

“souplesse du genie”<sup>45</sup> of the *honnête homme* is not necessarily commensurate with the conscious dissimulation or fabrication of his own feelings, but rather with a profound knowledge of his composite self and an understanding of how his words and actions affect others.

Another aspect of Méré’s social philosophy that favored sincerity over simulation is his insistence on the salonnier’s real pleasure and self-confidence.<sup>46</sup> These qualities can not be faked. They guarantee that the salonnier does not fall into the vice of affectation. Only a person who really feels comfortable appears comfortable in the company of others. Méré does not offer this advice in the spirit of simple positive reinforcement. His “souci de soi,” as Patrick Dandrey terms it,<sup>47</sup> is more pragmatic than psychological; he calculates that one can not please others without pleasing oneself at the same time. While the stage actor must feign emotions to give pleasure to his audience, the salonnier is free not only to feel emotions, but to take pleasure in them as well.

Despite the clear distinction in his writings between the stage actor and the social actor, Méré paradoxically claims that the key to feeling confident and free to enjoy oneself in any social setting is to imagine that one is, indeed, a theatrical actor. He explains this “trick” in his “Discours VI: Suite du Commerce du Monde”:

Je suis persuadé qu’en beaucoup d’occasions il n’est pas inutile de regarder ce qu’on fait comme une Comedie, et de s’imaginer qu’on jouë un personnage de theatre. Cette pensée empêche d’avoir rien trop à cœur, et donne ensuite une liberté de langage et d’action, qu’on n’a point,

---

<sup>45</sup> Méré, “Discours VI: Suite du Commerce du Monde,” 3:157.

<sup>46</sup> Méré, “Discours des Agrémens,” 2:12: “cette gentillesse [...] procede principalement d’une humeur enjouée avec une grande confiance que ce qu’on fait sera bien receu”; “Quatrième Conversation,” 1:57: “pour bien faire une chose, il ne suffit pas de la savoir, il faut s’y plaire”; “Discours V: Le Commerce du Monde,” 3:151: “quand on se trouve bien dans une compagnie et qu’on est assuré d’y plaire, on n’a qu’à suivre son inclination.”

<sup>47</sup> Dandrey, “Préface. La sagesse de l’élégance,” k.

quand on est troublé de crainte et d'inquiétude. Ce qui m'en plaît davantage, c'est qu'on ne s'abaisse que bien peu dans une disgrâce, et qu'on ne s'élève pas trop dans la prospérité [...]<sup>48</sup>

In this passage, the salonnier is likened to the stage actor (designated by the word “comédien”), and this for purely psychological reasons. Salonniers should pretend that they are stage actors, not to create a dichotomy between inner feeling and outer appearance, but to voluntarily delude themselves! Telling themselves that everything that they see, experience, and do is but an illusion, they can gain a certain philosophical distance from their immediate fears and desires.<sup>49</sup> Méré’s psychological trick of pretending to be a stage actor serves not to evacuate all real emotion from social interaction, but to take one’s emotions with a grain of salt, to achieve a certain objectivity vis-à-vis oneself.

Thus the manifestation of emotion in a salon setting was problematic not only for salonnières, as discussed in my previous chapter, but also for their male counterparts. Méré’s *honnête homme*, not unlike the *honnête femme* theorized by Jacques Du Bosc, never appears possessed by his emotions.<sup>50</sup> Salonniers are expected to use their sense of judgment to selectively unleash strong emotions for the sake of social “acting,” thus collapsing the Cartesian divide between reason and passion. Méré’s *honnête homme* does

---

<sup>48</sup> Méré, “Discours VI: Suite du Commerce du Monde,” 3:158.

<sup>49</sup> See also La Bruyère, *Les Caractères*, 224: “Dans 100 ans [...] ce sera le même théâtre & les mêmes décorations, ce ne seront plus les mêmes acteurs. Tout ce qui se réjouit sur une grâce reçue, ou ce qui s’attriste et se désespère sur un refus, tous auront disparu de dessus la scène. Il s’avance déjà sur le théâtre d’autres hommes qui vont jouer dans une même pièce les mêmes rôles; ils s’évanouiront à leur tour; et ceux qui ne sont pas encore, un jour ne seront plus: de nouveaux acteurs ont pris leur place. Quel fonds à faire sur un personnage de comédie!”

<sup>50</sup> According to Scudéry, any man who is truly in love with a lady is incapable of behaving and conversing properly and with “good grace” in her presence. See Scudéry, “Conversation de l’air galant” in *De l’air galant et autres Conversations*, 55: “Il est peu d’hommes fort amoureux, qui soient forts galants [...] et quoique l’amour ne semble être qu’une bagatelle, c’est pourtant la chose du monde la plus rare que de trouver un amant qui le soit de bonne grâce.”

not dissimulate like the stage actor, nor does he consciously induce his emotions to the point that they overpower him. His perfection lies in his willingness to emote, naturally but judiciously, in front of those he aims to please. He is a “bon acteur” in society precisely because he has the courage not to “act” all the time. The historian Myriam Maître maintains that the general preoccupation in the seventeenth century with naturalness in salon comportment was itself symptomatic of the self-consciousness and, therefore, unnaturalness of salonniers.<sup>51</sup> However, Méré believed that self-control and self-awareness did not necessarily imply manipulation or dissimulation. It was possible to cultivate one’s nature into an art without being artificial, to collapse the distinction between performance and nonperformance, between acting a role and being oneself in polite society.

### ***The Performance of Gallantry***

Though salon sociability generally aspired toward naturalness, whether feigned or genuine, one form of social interaction practiced in the salon was openly artificial: the subtle art of courtship known as gallantry. Charles Sorel satirically depicts this practice in his novel *Le Berger Extravagant*. The lovesick protagonist Lysis habitually confuses literary art and social reality, leading to his misinterpretation of the laws of gallantry. In the presence of ladies, he believes he is supposed to conduct himself like a tragicomedian representing an Arcadian shepherd, to express himself with sentimental, verbal, and corporeal exaggerations according to theatrical convention. He innocently transforms the refined social performance of gallantry into a ridiculous, histrionic display. Sorel uses

---

<sup>51</sup> Maître, *Les précieuses*, 444: “Cependant, l’insistance même des théoriciens mondains sur le naturel des attitudes dans le cercle amical signale bien ce que ce *naturel* doit au contraire à un art caché, à une attention de chaque instant aux circonstances particulières de l’échange.”

Lysis's confusion between theatrical performance and social commerce to satirize gallantry as a stylized practice based on illusion and artfulness, a formalized social performance distinct from the customary naturalness of conversation.

During the seventeenth century, the idea of gallantry was ambiguous and troubling, associated simultaneously with civility, insincerity, social deference, and sexual exploitation. As was discussed in the preceding chapter, gallantry and civility in salon culture were interdependent. Young men learned how to conduct themselves politely by courting women. According to Madeleine de Scudéry in "La Conversation de l'air galant," "true" gallantry refers not to a man's courtship of one woman, but to his subsequent courteousness, gentleness, and deference toward all women in a social setting. Scudéry's desire to asexualize the notion of gallantry is undoubtedly motivated by the problematic relationship between love and civility in the seventeenth century. Not only was love used by women to teach men the art of civility, civility could be used by men to gain sexual favors from women. As the literary historian Alain Viala remarks, "l'art de plaire peut être mis au service de visées de débauche."<sup>52</sup> In that case, Scudéry does not blame men in her "Conversation de l'air galant," but rather unprincipled women who "s'imaginent qu'à force d'être indulgentes à leurs galants, elles les conservent."<sup>53</sup> The term "galanterie" implied the gentle services and signs of respect paid to women in order to please them in society, to gain their favor or their heart, or to engage them in a love affair. It entailed the possibility of aggression against female virtue under the guise of

---

<sup>52</sup> Viala, "Le naturel galant," 64.

<sup>53</sup> Scudéry, "*De l'air galant*" et autres *Conversations*, 56.

civility. Women expected to be treated with deference and politeness; at the same time, they suspected such treatment to be just an act.

Reflections of this ambiguity can be found in various seventeenth-century sources. In Pierre Corneille's comedy *Mélite*, the young gentleman Tircis admits to his friend and then his sister that he likes composing for women love poetry filled "de plaintes, d'alarmes, de soupirs, de sanglots, de tourmens, & de larmes," but that they are just words arranged according to "la cadence" and "le son," recited harmoniously but not genuinely felt.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, in an article appearing in the 1672 edition of the periodical *Le Mercure galant*, a young man visits a young woman "par galanterie," that is, just to "entretenir la conversation, (c'est une chose assez ordinaire, & si la pluspart de nos jeunes Gens ne parloient d'amour aux dames & ne louoient leurs beautez, ils n'auroient souvent rien à dire.)"<sup>55</sup> The character Philiste claims in "Les Jeux, préface à *Mathilde*" by Scudéry that "c'est le point le plus important de la Morale des Dames, que de douter de tout ce qu'on leur dit en galanterie."<sup>56</sup> Méré complains of the falsity inherent in gallantry:

Le plus fâcheux inconvenient que je remarque dans la galanterie, c'est que pour l'ordinaire elle est fausse [...] Pour estre veritable et comme elle doit estre, il faut qu'elle se pratique d'une manière qui plaise, et de plus qu'elle soit bien naturelle. Car ce n'est pas assez de faire une chose galamment et de bonne grace, à moins qu'elle ne parte du cœur, parce qu'autrement ce n'est qu'un personnage qu'on joüe, et qu'on se dement à la premiere occasion: de sorte que ce qu'on a fait galamment, n'estant pas soutenu ne paroist plus galant, & cela fait dire que la galanterie est fausse.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Corneille, *Mélite* (I, iii). See also (II, v): "Tu sais mieux qui je suis, & ma libre humeur / N'a part en mes vers que celle de rimeur."

<sup>55</sup> Donneau de Visé, *Le Mercure galant*, 1672/1, 13-14.

<sup>56</sup> Scudéry, "Les Jeux servant de preface à *Mathilde*," 51.

<sup>57</sup> Méré, "Discours des Agréments," 2:43.

Falsity constitutes an aesthetic flaw more than a moral vice in Méré's eyes; only a heart-felt passion is capable of endowing one's action with good grace. Nonetheless, gallantry was a social protocol, a game in which the passionate speech of the gentleman was received and judged by the lady not as a real declaration of love, but as an exercise in style. The character Mathilde says of gallantry in Scudéry's "Conversation de la dissimulation et de la sincérité": "Il y a un certain langage flatteur introduit dans le monde, qui ne trompe personne [...] et qui ne détruit pas la sincérité."<sup>58</sup> The overall "sincerity" of the gentleman is not called into question because his sentimentality, whether heart-felt or not, is not taken seriously. It serves primarily as a *divertissement* for both the performer and his interlocutor, revealing his mastery of a verbal performance style. In *Le Misanthrope* (IV, i) by Molière, Éliante incredulously receives Philinte's tender declaration of love, replying "Vous vous divertissez, Philinte." Still, if gallantry had always been a game of dissimulation precluding the possibility of "veritable sentiment," it would not have been as interesting and as troubling as it was for the ladies in fictional and real salon society. The possibility that behind a man's gallant performance was a hint of real passion forced them to hold the performance in "doubt," to judge it with skepticism without completely dismissing it.

Whether in courtship or in social commerce, gallantry constituted the performance of a discursive style in which flattery was enveloped in flowery language, and sentimentalism was tempered with playfulness. In his novel *Le Berger extravagant*, Sorel underscores the artificial aspects of this social practice through the theatrics of his protagonist Lysis. Lysis is the name that Louis, the son of a rich Parisian merchant, calls

---

<sup>58</sup> Scudéry, "Conversation de la dissimulation et de la sincérité" in *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 370.

himself when he decides to become a shepherd like those in pastoral literature. Lysis equates gallantry with the art of theatrical declamation. He spends the day declaiming about love, for shepherds of his type “devoient tousjours estre dans la gravité, et ne parler qu’avec des soupirs et des termes amoureux et mourans.”<sup>59</sup> He learns the art of gallantry not from a “maîtresse,” but by reading pastoral novels and by going to the theater at the hôtel de Bourgogne and in Jesuit *collèges*. The actors of pastoral tragicomedies serve as his models in real life, as his cousin Adrien, the draper attests:

J'allois souvent écouter à sa porte et luy entendois faire des discours d'amour comme s'il eust parlé à quelque belle dame, et puis apres il se respondoit pour elle en contrefaisant sa voix [...] il se mit à reciter des vers dedans sa chambre en se regardant dedans le miroir, pour voir s' il avoit bonne grace [...] Il n' a pas laissé depuis de s'estudier tous les jours à contrefaire le berger, et au lieu de houlette, il prenoit tantost un ballet, et tantost une ratissoire. Le plus souvent il prenoit des fourchettes qui estoient en mon arriere boutique; elles luy estoient bien plus aysees, parce qu' elles estoient longues, et il m' en a rompu deux ou trois à appuyer negligemment sa jambe dessus en berger passionné comme il a veu faire à l' hostel de Bourgogne.<sup>60</sup>

Lysis's speeches about love are even more vehement than those performed at the hôtel de Bourgogne, for in his passion he manages to break the pitchforks serving as his shepherd's crook. His practice of studying his facial expressions in a mirror, common among actors, is generally regarded as a ridiculous, affected habit.<sup>61</sup> Lysis does not undergo this intensive theatrical training in gallantry in order to seduce women and exploit them sexually. He celebrates and idealizes love through his performances which

<sup>59</sup> Sorel, *Le Berger extravagant*, 100.

<sup>60</sup> Sorel, *Le Berger extravagant*, 27.

<sup>61</sup> In 1670, Le Boulanger de Chalussay ridicules Molière for this practice: “Là le miroir à la main, & ce grand homme en face, / Il n'est contorsion, posture, ni grimace, / Que ce grand Écolier du plus grand des bouffons, / Ne fasse, & ne refasse en cent & cent façons.” Antoine Riccoboni warns in *L'art du théâtre*: “Au reste, gardez-vous bien, Madame, de déclamer devant un miroir pour étudier vos gestes; cette methode est la mere de l'affectation.” John Bulwer recommends in *Chironomia* that one rely on the observations and corrections of a few trusted friends, rather than on what one sees in a mirror. (See Chaouche, *L'art du comédien*, 79 for these citations.) However, Lysis has no other recourse but to study himself in a mirror. His dementia isolates him from most other people, except for those who offer their friendship in order to secretly mock him.



are heartfelt, even before he has anyone to love. By exalting his own capacity for love, this son-of-a-merchant-turned-Arcadian-shepherd is engaging in a type of self-ennoblement.<sup>62</sup> A passion as grandiose as Lysis's can only be expressed dramatically, as he explains to the simpleton Carmelin:

Puis que c'est beaucoup en amour, d'estre d'un gracieux abord, et que la contenance charme quelquefois plus que les paroles, il faut que tu prennes garde à bien régler la tienne, quand tu seras devant ta bergere. Si tu as un mouchoir blanc, je suis d'avis que tu l'ayes toujours en main. Ceux qui declament en ont tousjours, et les comediens mesme de Paris en tiennent sur leur theatre. Or il faut imiter ces gens là: car s'ils ne font les choses comme elles sont, au-moins les font ils comme elles doivent estre.<sup>63</sup>

Lysis does not distinguish between the art of gallantry and that of the theater; in his deranged mind, they offer the same ideal of verisimilitude serving to transcend social reality, which he finds lacking in eloquence, passion, and poetry. He does not learn the art of declamation in order to perform it professionally on the stage, but to bring the stage directly into salon conversation, and to embody a literary ideal of love and eloquence.

Lysis finds an object for his extravagant love in a certain Catherine, whom he gallantly calls Charite. This "soleil" in Lysis's eyes is in reality a plain and indifferent chamber maid who follows the family she serves from Paris to their country estate in Brie. Naturally, Lysis follows behind, only too content to guard a small flock of sheep in this bucolic setting. A group of Parisian aristocrats also flock around Lysis in Brie, inviting him to salon gatherings at their country estates in order to witness his antics, which "valaient mieux que les plus excellentes comedies du monde."<sup>64</sup> Lysis has ample

---

<sup>62</sup> The musicologist Giuseppe Gerbino evokes the aristocratic quality of "love insanity" in *Music and the Myth of Arcadia in Renaissance Italy*, 62: "This was not necessarily a sign of weakness. As early as the thirteenth century, physicians and philosophers construed the irrepressible experience of love as the disease of the nobility. If anything, the victimization of the shepherd was a sign of his aristocratic upbringing and sensitivity."

<sup>63</sup> Sorel, *Le Berger extravagant*, 226.

<sup>64</sup> Sorel, *Le Berger extravagant*, 73.

opportunities to woo Charite because Leonor, whom she serves, often desires to “jouyr de la conversation de son gentil berger.”<sup>65</sup> When Lysis decides to found a school in which others can become shepherds “à [s]on imitation,” a salonnier suggests that he place his advertising placard alongside those of the theater: “Ô que cette affiche aura bonne mine au dessous de celle des comediens! s’escria Clarimond, elles parleront toutes deux d’un mesme sujet.”<sup>66</sup> Lysis’s behavior is only encouraged by these salonniers who delight in the ridiculous spectacle he unwittingly provides.

What exactly is Sorel mocking through the odd behavior of his antihero? In his “Preface,” Sorel specifies that many of Lysis’s actions (e.g., dressing like a shepherdess, pretending that he has transformed into a tree) are inspired by the whimsical elements of pastoral literature, from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* to Honoré d’Urfé’s *Astrée*. Lysis’s theatrics in the middle of salon society, however, seem to transcend literary satire. What does Sorel mean when he declares in his “Partie II – Advertissement [aux] Lecteurs” that *Le Berger extravagant* “est aussi remply de quelque secrete raillerie. Il faudra concevoir ce que je veux dire, si l’on veut recevoir un plaisir parfait”?<sup>67</sup> Lysis’s dramatic manner of courting and socializing is ridiculed by the salonniers in his company. In view of Lysis’s bourgeois origins, is Sorel mocking the affectation of arrivistes endeavoring to find their place in aristocratic society? It is unlikely, for in *La Maison des Jeu*, Sorel defends the socially heterogeneous composition (“le mélange des

---

<sup>65</sup> Sorel, *Le Berger extravagant*, 83.

<sup>66</sup> Sorel, *Le Berger extravagant*, 233.

<sup>67</sup> Sorel, *Le Berger extravagant*, 261.

conditions”) of his fictional salon gathering.<sup>68</sup> Lysis’s exaggerated behavior magnifies for Sorel’s reader the inherent folly in a common social practice. Gallantry forces men to play an artificial role in order to please women, to artfully represent passion, whether real or feigned, in a manner that overcomes female skepticism. Are salonniers not confusing fictional verisimilitude and social reality, as does Lysis, when the rapport between the sexes is mediated by so much artifice? The secret raillery may very well be aimed at salonniers in general, whose insincere performances are just as artificial as Lysis’s sincere ones: “Je feray voir que le berger extravagant dans sa plus grande folle en sçait plus que ceux qui se mocquent de luy.”<sup>69</sup>

Between the supposed nonperformance of *l’honnêteté* and the artful performance of gallantry, salon culture vacillated between naturalness and artifice, making each interlocutor wonder if the others were really what they appeared to be. The salon was not necessarily pure dissimulation: it cultivated one’s genuine predisposition for social commerce into the art of conversation. It called for a type of acting deemed “natural,” in which polished expression did not necessarily sacrifice heartfelt emotion.

### ***Poetic Recitation and Memory Performance***

The ambiguity of conversation as performance and nonperformance was only heightened by the salon practices of poetic recitation and impromptu. These practices

---

<sup>68</sup> Sorel, *La Maison des Jeux*, 29-30: “Agenor estoit du corps du Parlement, & Clymante estoit de la Chambre des Comptes: Et comme ils estoient jeunes encore, les affaires n’avoient pas tellement rabbatu la gayeté de leur esprit, qu’ils ne s’adonnassent au galaneries du siecle [...] Quant à Dorilas [...] l’occupation qu’il avoit eüe dans la guerre, n’avoit point effarouché son naturel, qui avoit esté autrefois cultivé par les bonnes lettres. Nous voyons icy que la compagnie estoit mêlée, comme cela arrive d’ordinaire, de telle façon que toutes les choses que l’on en peut rapporter, sont plus croyables que ce qui se treuvent dans plusieurs Romans, dont les Autheurs s’imaginent qu’il iroit de leur honneur, s’ils ne faisoient tous leurs personnages Princes & Chevaliers.”

<sup>69</sup> Sorel, *Le Berger extravagant*, 261.

served to display the salonnier's memory and creativity. They were valued for their spontaneous, unplanned execution and their emergent qualities inspired by the present conversation. However, they could have also been secretly prepared beforehand and strategically inserted into conversation in order to impress one's interlocutors. The possibility of feigned spontaneity in these arts in turn could reflect upon one's conversation. Conversation similarly presented itself to be extemporized but may secretly have entailed the recitation of expressions and witticisms practiced beforehand. The second part of this chapter will show how the quality of spontaneity in the performance arts of poetic recitation and impromptu illuminated and informed that of conversation, and vice versa.

The art of poetic recitation could occur in one of two forms during a typical salon gathering: verses that were recollected or verses that were composed (impromptu). The first type of performance tested the speaker's spontaneous memory, while the second tested the speaker's spontaneous creativity. In order to illustrate the social importance of poetic recitation, Scudéry offers an anecdote in "Les Bains de Thermopyles," a story which takes place in ancient Greece, first published in *Le Grand Cyrus* (1649-1653) and then in *Les Conversations sur divers sujets*.<sup>70</sup> While the poet Euripides takes a walk with his lady and gentlemen friends, several soldiers approach him and fall to their knees in gratitude. They explain that they were once prisoners of war in Sicily and harshly treated in captivity. Convinced that they would die prisoners, two of the soldiers passed their time reciting from memory the verses of Euripides. The Prince who was holding them captive, an amateur of Euripides, ordered the two prisoners to recite for him without

---

<sup>70</sup> Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 700-704.

preparation. Despite their wretched condition, the prisoners were able to recite “assez bien” the majority of Euripides’s tragedy *Phoenissae*. Enchanted by their performance, the Prince proclaimed: “Me preservent des Dieux, dit-il, de charger plus longtemps de chaînes des Gens qui ont la memoire remplie de tant de belles choses.”<sup>71</sup> He liberated not only the two recitants but all of their soldier companions in captivity. The soldiers’ testimony serves to remind the strolling group in “Les Bains de Thermopyles,” as well as Scudéry’s readers, that poetry is not simply an ornament, but a force that can subdue even the cruelest of tyrants. Because one never knows when and for what purpose one might need to recite, a wide variety of verses should be perpetually memorized for prompt recollection. Such demonstrations may prove critical in establishing one’s reputation and one’s place in the liberal society of the salon elite.

Brief poetic recitations could be easily incorporated into salon conversation,<sup>72</sup> often serving to illustrate or refute that which was said and, as Anne-Madeleine Goulet has written about salon singing, to reflect or influence the rapport between interlocutors. Speakers offered to recite passages from a vast repertoire of texts which all salonnières were expected to know well:<sup>73</sup> plays, operas, poetry collections (sentimental, religious, satirical, burlesque), even passages from novels and published letters. By incorporating poetic citations into their discourse, salonnières took pleasure in ornamenting the prose of ordinary conversation with melodious verse, thereby demonstrating the excellence of

---

<sup>71</sup> Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 702.

<sup>72</sup> Génétiot, *Poétique du loisir mondain*, 414: “[...] du fait de sa finalité circonstancielle et de sa relative brièveté, [la création poétique] peut prendre place à l’intérieur même de la conversation dont elle constitue un ornement et, dans le meilleur des cas, un aboutissement.”

<sup>73</sup> Bury, *La Littérature et la politesse* 55: “un ‘savoir’ mondain, qui repose moins sur l’accumulation des sommes, à la manière humaniste, qu’à l’attention au changement, à la mode [...] livres [...] romans, recueils de poésie, recueils épistolaires.”

their literary culture. In the conversations written by Scudéry and Michel de Pure, speakers support their statements by citing poetic passages much more frequently than examples from history or their personal life. Historical and personal examples were thought to offer only a partial representation of reality, whereas the beauty of poetic language was considered to carry the weight of universal truth. One recitation in Scudéry's "Conversation des passions que les hommes ont inventées" demonstrates how poetry was often "applied" through recitation to the immediate discursive and interpersonal context:

En un mot, [dit Cleandre] tout ce qu'il y a de bizarre dans l'Amour, ne se peut trouver, ce me semble, en aucune autre passion, qu'en celle des Courtisans, pour leur Prince. Vous avez raison, dit Alcé: & pour moy, quand je voy des Gens naturellement tres-éclairés, & qu'une longue experience a rendus tres-habiles, se laisser quelquefois tromper jusques à la fin de leur vie, aux vaines esperances de la Cour, encore qu'ils sentent bien qu'elles les trompent: il me semble que je voy cet Amant du Theatre ancien & moderne, qui dit:

*Je la connois ingrate, & je l'aime & je meurs:*

*Et je me sens mourir, & n'y voy nul remede:*

*Et craindrois d'en trouver, tant l'Amour me possede.*

Mais à vous entendre parler de l'amour, dit Philocrite à Cleandre; on diroit que vous estes presque aussi amoureux, qu'ambitieux. Celanire rougit; & Cleandre fut en peine comment il pourroit répondre, sans découvrir ce qu'il vouloit cacher, & sans que Celanire l'accusast aussi de manquer d'amour, & de porter la dissimulation un peu trop loin.<sup>74</sup>

Alcé's dramatic recitation serves multiple purposes in this conversation. Since the salonniers are currently discussing life at court, Alcé recites these verses to show how the representation of the self-deluding lover can be "applied" to the desperate courtier. The circle is also quick to interpret his literary recitation as a disguised "déclaration d'amour" addressed to Celanire. Finally, this recitation is a memory exercise extending beyond the speaker himself. Alcé does not name the author or the play from which he is citing, or even the ancient work on which it is based. None of this information is revealed thereafter in Scudéry's text. This deliberate omission suggests that the fictional salon

---

<sup>74</sup> Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 306-308.

circle, and Scudéry's readers, should be able to recognize the source, Jean de la Fontaine's comedy *L'Eunuque* freely adapted from Terence's play. Alcé's recitation thus functions like a riddle challenging his listeners to recall its source and testing their cultural background. Perhaps Philocrite's sudden transition from Alcé's citation to Cleandre's affections is intended to conceal her inability to recognize the allusion to La Fontaine's play.

A well-performing memory was a subject of fascination and an object of desire in seventeenth-century polite society. According to La Bruyère, poetic recitation is a popular form of entertainment at feasts.<sup>75</sup> Sorel maintains in *La Maison des Jeux* that the demonstration of a good memory is most common among "des hommes de condition [...] & beaucoup de filles de bon esprit."<sup>76</sup> According to Faret in *L'Honnête homme*, "Ce n'est pas tout que d'avoir du mérite, il le faut sçavoir debiter et le faire valoir. L'industrie aide beaucoup à faire esclater la vertu [...] les effects du jugement sont si lents au prix de ceux qui naissent de la vivacité de l'imagination et de la promptitude de la mémoire."<sup>77</sup> In *L'Art de plaire dans la conversation* by Ortigue de Vaumorière, a treatise in the form of successive dialogues, the character Dorante reflects on the importance of a prompt memory in a salon setting. He compares it to "L'Intendant d'une Maison [qui] ne reçoit le revenu de son Maître, que pour acquitter ensuite ce qu'on luy ordonne de païer"; the memory, like the intendant, amasses riches only to give them away.<sup>78</sup> Dorante cannot

---

<sup>75</sup> La Bruyère, *Les Caractères*, 42: "Il se distingue toujours par une grande singularité: il ne veut ni chanter à son tour, ni réciter dans un repas, ni même danser avec les autres"; 56: "Ainsi un vieillard de soixante ans s'avise d'apprendre des vers par cœur, et de les réciter à table dans un festin."

<sup>76</sup> Sorel, *La Maison des Jeux*, 280.

<sup>77</sup> Faret, *L'Honnête homme*, 59.

<sup>78</sup> Ortigue de Vaumorière, *L'art de plaire dans la conversation*, 250.

resist adding the following conceit: “il faut que l’un & l’autre soient fidèles, & il arriveroit un fâcheux desordre, si la mémoire ne retenoit pas assez, & que l’Intendant retint un peu trop.” In the “Conversation des louanges” by Scudéry, Cléandre’s mere mention of two quatrains relevant to the current discussion is met with the request that he recite them immediately, so as not to waste the fruits of such a well-performing memory: “[...] il faut que Cléandre nous dise les vers puis qu’il s’en souvient.”<sup>79</sup> A good memory is a “beautiful” thing, according to *L’Esprit de cour* by René Bary. This work presents models of compliments that can be paid to a lady: on her beautiful hands, her nice figure, her eyes, her bosom, her dancing, singing, lute playing, pronunciation of verses, and the beauty of her memory.<sup>80</sup> When the gentleman Arcace compliments the lady Satira on her infallible memory in *L’Esprit de cour*, she quickly responds that she must therefore lack presence of mind, for one cannot coexist with the other. She then proceeds to feign stupidity in order to prove her point. Arcace points out that Satira’s witty repartee only proves that an excellent memory and presence of mind can and do exist in the same lovely person.

Did the salonnier’s memory only retain poetry in order to recite it during conversation? Did not the salonnier risk resembling Michel de Montaigne’s portrait of the pedant? Anticipating Ortigue de Vaumorière’s monetary image, the pedant memorizes information “pour cette seule fin d’en faire parade, d’en entretenir autrui, et d’en faire des contes, comme une vaine monnoye, inutile à tout autre usage et emploie

---

<sup>79</sup> Scudéry, *Nouvelles conversations de morale*, 438.

<sup>80</sup> Bary, *L’Esprit de cour*, 250-253.



qu'à compter et jeter."<sup>81</sup> Montaigne also offers this animalistic image of literary memorization: "Tout ainsi que les oyseaux vont quelquefois à la quête du grein, et le portent au bec sans le taster, pour en faire bechée à leurs petits, ainsi nos pedantes vont pillotant la science dans les livres, et ne la logent qu'au bout de leurs lèvres, pour la dégorger seulement et mettre au vent."<sup>82</sup> A salonnier reciting verses was not supposed to appear to have freshly memorized them for the occasion. Conversation alone was supposed to guide the memory, spontaneously choosing from a wide repertoire of verses reflecting one's literary culture. This culture was supposed to have been acquired effortlessly and pleasurably, and not through last-minute, concerted effort. Thus in the conversations written by Scudéry, de Pure, and Sarasin, a speaker often justifies his ability to recollect verses through the sheer pleasure he has derived from casually reading or hearing them:

[...]ces Quatrains de Morale [...] toute ignorante que je suis, j'ay appris la plus grande partie par cœur, tant je les ay trouvez jolis & galans, quoy que les Personnes les plus sçavantes n'y trouvent pas moins leur compte que moy.<sup>83</sup>

[...] une stance qui est dans la Comedie des *Visionnaires*, & qui est la plus spirituelle & ridicule qui puisse estre en son genre [...] il me la dit avec cet enjouement qui luy est naturel, et me la dit avec l'accompagnement du geste & de la voix, si plaisamment, qu'il me porta à l'apprendre par cœur. Il faut que je vous la die; possible ne vous déplaira-t'elle pas.<sup>84</sup>

Si fait bien, moi, ajouta M. de Trilport, qui en ai retenu des fragments, parce que j'ai pris plaisir à les lire.<sup>85</sup>

Memorization and pleasure in these contexts are directly proportional. Bernard Lamy suggests that the pleasure procured through poetry is especially intense; more than prose,

---

<sup>81</sup> Montaigne, "Du pedantisme" in *Essais*, 136-137.

<sup>82</sup> Montaigne, *Essais*, 136.

<sup>83</sup> Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 295.

<sup>84</sup> De Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 1:348-349.

<sup>85</sup> Sarasin, "S'il faut qu'un jeune homme soit amoureux," 176.

poetry charms through artful language and expression.<sup>86</sup> If the pleasure of the poetic text does not induce effortless memorization after just one reading or hearing, it repeatedly brings the reader or listener back to the same text, making memorization inevitable. Memory performance in a salon context was supposed to be a source of pleasure, not strain.

Since the salonnier's memory performed out of pleasure, it did not have to struggle for perfection. In many literary representations of salons, speakers who propose to recite poetry warn the circle that their memory may be faulty, or entreat the company to accept only a partial recitation. By openly admitting the limits of their memory, they demonstrate that their recollections are genuinely spontaneous. While many of Scudéry's salonniers perform poetic recitations admirably well, others are less successful. In her "Conversation de l'ennuy sans sujet" and her "Conversation de la magnificence," characters are unable to recite the verses they have cited during conversation; they must content themselves with mere evocation or gloss. The most unsuccessful, embarrassing poetic recitation occurs in her "Conversation des passions que les hommes ont inventées." The female narrator proposes to recite a few stanzas from a well-known poem in order to support her argument against that of Cléandre: "Je m'en souviens, dit Cleandre: mais je ne sçay pas ce que vous en pouvez tirer pour vous, Vous verrez, luy dis-je, que vous ne vous en souvenez pas."<sup>87</sup> After she effortlessly recites several

---

<sup>86</sup> Lamy, *L'art de parler*, 140: "Il faut donc distinguer le discours en deux especes, en discours naturel, en discours artificiel: Le naturel est celui dont on doit se servir dans la conversation pour s'exprimer, pour instruire, & pour faire connoître les mouvemens de sa volonté, & les pensées de son esprit: l'artificiel est celui que l'on employe pour plaire, & dans lequel s'éloignant de l'usage ordinaire & naturel, on se sert de tout l'artifice possible pour charmer ceux qui l'entendront prononcer [...] les discours en Vers sont appelez particulièrement artificiels."

<sup>87</sup> Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 294.

quatrains to support her position, Cléandre's response catches her by surprise: "Mais vous verrez, Madame, que vôtre mémoire, toute heureuse qu'elle est, vous trompe; pour cette fois, plus que la mienne, qui l'est beaucoup moins."<sup>88</sup> Cléandre cannot recite from memory the subsequent stanzas from the same poem, but his summary of them succeeds in disproving the narrator's position altogether. She can only respond laughingly, "Voilà ce que c'est, repris-je, en riant, de vouloir faire l'habile mal à propos. Je renonce à citer rien de ma vie."<sup>89</sup> Scudéry's speakers never give the impression of struggling with or worrying over the shortcomings of their memory. They prefer these slight faults over an affected accuracy throwing doubt on the spontaneity of their poetic recollections.

Thus, through the demonstration of pleasure over perfection during poetic recitation, it was possible to avoid appearing bookish or pretentious. The salonnier's ability to spontaneously recollect verses implied that the text had become second nature. As Montaigne insists in his essay on pedants, "Nous prenons en garde les opinions et le sçavoir d'autrui, et puis c'est tout. Il les faut faire nostres [...] il ne faut pas attacher le sçavoir à l'ame, il l'y faut incorporer."<sup>90</sup> When a salonnier was inspired by the immediate conversation to recall a text, this recitation served to renew the text and reinvigorate conversation.

In his study of seventeenth-century salon poetry, Alain Génétiot has claimed that recitation in salon culture was only an ornament or, at most, a conclusion to

---

<sup>88</sup> Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 298.

<sup>89</sup> Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 299.

<sup>90</sup> Montaigne, *Essais*, 137, 140.

conversation.<sup>91</sup> However, in the “Conversation des louanges” by Scudéry, it is conversation that serves as a pretext for the salonniers to spontaneously perform poetic recitations from memory one after another. Once they are gathered, Clarinte’s guests discuss a eulogy they have just heard at Court, and thereafter reflect on the giving of praise in general. One of the guests casually evokes poets who praise themselves in their verses, most notably Malherbe. This allusion really functions as a friendly challenge, the naming of a game, an invitation to perform. Accordingly, the salonniers scan their memories for passages in Malherbe’s poetry in which he praises himself. Clarinte’s description of her guests suggests that they are up to the challenge:

Anténor, poursuivit-elle, a beaucoup de sçavoir & d’esprit naturel; il connoist les vivans & les morts; Cléandre a pour amis tous ceux qui écrivent ou qui parlent bien avec distinction; Polémon a veü le monde dès le commencement de sa vie, & a beaucoup de discernement; & Palinis, quoy-qu’un peu difficile en toutes sortes de choses, a tant d’esprit, & l’a si délicat, & si éclairé.<sup>92</sup>

Surely such cultivated characters can readily produce the pertinent passages of this celebrated poet.<sup>93</sup> In the exchanges that follow, conversation serves primarily to display the treasures of the speakers’ memories, recited one after the other in what constitutes a dialogue of poetic recitations:

Je me souviens, interrompit Cléandre, de tous les beaux endroits où ce grand Poète se louë, mais je ne me remets pas qu’il parle modestement de luy-mesme. Vous l’allez voir, reprît Palinis, par ces quatre vers: [recitation...] J’avois oublié cet endroit, reprît Cléandre, mais il faut que vous avoüiez que Malherbe estoit bien plus Malherbe lors qu’il disoit au Roy à qui il parloit [recitation...] Il y en a encore trois stances de pareille force, poursuivit-il, qui n’ont jamais blessé personne, & qui valent mieux que les quatre vers modestes que la belle Palinis a rapportez. Cét autre endroit dans un autre ouvrage, reprît Anténor, est encore fort noble: [recitation...] Je me

---

<sup>91</sup> See note 72 in the present chapter.

<sup>92</sup> Scudéry, *Nouvelles conversations de morale*, 414.

<sup>93</sup> Scudéry, *Nouvelles conversations de morale*, 451: “mais quand on considère qu’il a changé & embelli la poésie françois à tel point, qu’il y a apparence qu’il sera toujours un modele parfait de ceux qui viendront, comme il l’a esté de ceux qui l’on suivi jusques à nous.”

souviens de trois vers seulement, dît Palinis, qui ont encore un bel orgueil; car en parlant au Roy, il dit: [recitation...]<sup>94</sup>

If poetic recitation from memory could be used to ornament conversation, it was also a performance art enjoyed for its independent qualities. It could even overshadow the conversation from which it emerged, reducing conversation to a mere structuring frame for spontaneous recollection.

As the preceding passage from Scudéry's "Conversation des louanges" demonstrates, salonniers were free to alternate between recitation and conversation. However, poetic recitation called for a vocal delivery distinct from that of conversation. According to Lamy, poetic pronunciation demands a particularly "artificial" and controlled vocal delivery, in stark contrast with the "natural" discursive style of conversation.<sup>95</sup> Poetry's metrical regularity and frequent repetition of letters, syllables, and words render it more musical<sup>96</sup> to the ear than conversational prose.<sup>97</sup> The language specialist Jean Hindret claims that poetry allows for more flexible pronunciation than conversation, ironically because of its strict meter. He explains that it is possible to

---

<sup>94</sup> Scudéry, *Nouvelles conversations de morale*, 447-450.

<sup>95</sup> See note 86 in the present chapter.

<sup>96</sup> Boileau, *Art poétique*, Chant I, ll. 109-110: "Il est un heureux choix de mots harmonieux. / Fuyez des mauvais sons le concours odieux"; ll. 157-158: "En vain vous me frappez d'un son mélodieux, / Si le terme est impropre, ou le tour vicieux"; l. 104: "Ayez pour la cadence une oreille sévère." Sorel, *De la connoissance des bons livres*, 184: "[...] comme la voix resserrée dans le canal d'une Trompette, a un son plus aigu que quand elle est poussée dans un air libre, Ainsi les paroles enfermées dans les mesures des Vers ont plus de vigueur que quand elles sont répandues dans un champ vague." Dubos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, 46: "Platon vante même assez cette partie de l'art poétique, laquelle sçait rendre un discours plus pompeux et plus agréable à l'oreille, en introduisant dans ses phrases un nombre et une harmonie qui lui plaisent plus que la cadence de la prose."

<sup>97</sup> Lamy, *L'art de parler*, 148: "l'artifice de ces figures consiste dans la repetition d'une lettre, d'une même terminaison, d'un même mot, par des temps mesurez, & par des intervalles égaux, tantôt au commencement, tantôt à la fin, tantôt au milieu d'une sentence, comme vous l'allez voir dans les exemples que je donne de ces figures, que j'ay tirées pour la plupart de quelques uns de nos Poètes, parce qu'il m'auroit été difficile d'en trouver dans notre Prose."

shorten the final syllable in the words “âge,” “fable,” “pouce,” and “emblème” if they are made to rhyme with the short final syllables of “sage,” “table,” “douce,” and “troisième”; however, this modification would “choque extrêmement l’oreille” during conversation.<sup>98</sup> The prosodic regularity of poetry and its lulling effect are counterbalanced, according to Lamy, “par des exclamations, par des apostrophes, par des digressions, & par mille autres figures qui entretiennent l’attention.”<sup>99</sup> Each figure calls for a unique vocal inflection, just as each poem calls for a distinct vocal tone in accordance with its genre. When Nicolas Boileau states in his *Art poétique* that the rondeau is characterized by naïveté, the madrigal by simplicity and tenderness,<sup>100</sup> the satire by adherence to the “Truth” (Boileau was a notorious satirist), the sonnet by majesty, and the elegy by plaintiveness,<sup>101</sup> he is referring not only to the quality of the text, but to its vocal delivery. Whereas the recitation of such poems in the twenty-first century is hardly distinguishable from the monotony of conversational speech, one must not underestimate the vocal shift during the seventeenth century between conversation and poetic recitation in the salon. The historian, actor, and baritone Michel Verschaeve points out that in the seventeenth century, stage actors “doubled” their consonants and traversed a remarkably wide

---

<sup>98</sup> Hindret, “Discours sur le sujet de cette Metode” in *L’art de bien prononcer et de bien parler la langue françoise*, n.p.

<sup>99</sup> Lamy, *L’art de parler*, 226.

<sup>100</sup> Maître, *Les précieuses*, 479: “[le] madrigal, le plus joli compromis possible entre la minceur de la forme et la tendresse de la pensée. Le madrigal a des origines orales, puisque c’est d’abord un genre de musique vocale, importé d’Italie, avant d’être un petit poème hétérométrique, sans grandes contraintes et dont la douceur amoureuse est le principal caractère.”

<sup>101</sup> Boileau, *Art poétique*, Chant I, ll. 112, 114, 139-140, 143-146: “Le sonnet orgueilleux [...] / L’élégie [...] ses douloureux caprices [...] / Tout poème est brillant de sa propre beauté. / Le rondeau, né gaulois, a la naïveté. [...] / Le madrigal, plus simple et plus noble en son tour, / Respire la douceur, la tendresse et l’amour. / L’ardeur de se montrer, et non pas de médire, / Arma la Vérité du vers de la satire.”

tessitura<sup>102</sup> not only for heightened expression, but also to be understood in large, noisy theaters.<sup>103</sup> Of course, the smaller the space and the closer the audience, the lesser the need for exaggerated consonants and drastic changes in pitch.<sup>104</sup> Poetic recitation nevertheless retained an artificial quality in the salon, justified not by “acoustics” but by the formality of a verbal art distinct from conversation.

Though poetic recitation is generally described in Sévigné’s *Correspondance* as a performance for the ears (“entendre réciter,” “ouïr réciter des vers”), it differed from conversation visually as well. The eyes of the recitant, unlike those of the reader occupied with the text, were expected to speak just as eloquently as the voice. The correspondence between the speaker’s voice and eyes was just as important in salon conversation, although their expression was less dramatic. In Scudéry’s “Conversation de parler trop ou trop peu,” the character Plotine is paid a compliment because there exists “un merveilleux rapport entre ses yeux et ses paroles.”<sup>105</sup> The *Dialogue des Yeux & de la Bouche*, a play by Sorel for salon performance, represents an amusing argument between a beautiful nymph’s Eyes and Mouth, finally resolved when Mouth tells Eyes, “pourveu que vous n’usurpiez point un Empire absolu dessus moy, je suis preste à vivre

---

<sup>102</sup> Verschaeve, *Le Traité de chant et mise en scène baroques*, 22: “Les tragédiennes de l’époque utilisaient une tessiture beaucoup plus étendue qu’aujourd’hui.”

<sup>103</sup> Verschaeve, *Le Traité de chant et mise en scène baroques*, 24: “Le lieu dans lequel se produit l’interprète est aussi déterminant pour évaluer la force du doublement des consonnes. C’est un problème délicat qui relève surtout de l’acoustique. Cette dernière, par sa bonne ou mauvaise qualité, joue en effet un rôle essentiel dans la restitution du message sonore.”

<sup>104</sup> Eugène Green’s invests his recent recording of “baroque” poetic recitations in *La parole baroque* with a *singspiel* quality (anachronism notwithstanding). He elongates certain vowels, for example, in order that they resonate with sustained pitch and sometimes audible vibrato.

<sup>105</sup> Scudéry, “*De l’air galant*” et autres *Conversations*, 85.

toujours en bonne intelligence avecque vous.”<sup>106</sup> Both Lamy and Boileau maintain that the different figures and passions contained in poetry must be represented clearly and distinctly by the voice and the eyes.<sup>107</sup> Salonnières thus distinguished formally between the artful delivery of recollected poetry and the “discours naturel” of conversation.

However, conversation and recitation from memory was at times more similar than most salonnières would care to admit. According to seventeenth-century testimonies, many statements pronounced in conversation were secretly memorized beforehand and presented as if they were extemporized. Ideally, the art of conversation allowed for a reconciliation between careful preparation and carefree spontaneity.

### *Conversation as Recitation*

Maître dispels the myth of total spontaneity in salon conversation, emphasizing that salonnières prepared themselves through their readings and writings:

Mais le passage par l'écriture [...] est plutôt conçu comme une base de la performance orale [...] La conversation mondaine n'est donc spontanée qu'en apparence: elle est le résultat d'un art caché qui lui confère son naturel, sa savante simplicité. Improviser est un art auquel s'entraînent, par toutes sortes de moyens dont la lecture et l'écriture [...] Mais ces échafaudages doivent disparaître au moment crucial de la performance et le public de la ruelle doit croire, face à la virtuosité verbale, à un jaillissement spontané.<sup>108</sup>

If conversation was not totally spontaneous, certain types of preparation were more acceptable than others. Those who wanted to appear well-spoken or learned in a salon

---

<sup>106</sup> Sorel, *Nouveau recueil*, 487.

<sup>107</sup> Lamy, *L'art de parler*, 79: “Les passions, comme nous avons dit, se peignent elles mêmes dans les yeux, & dans les paroles”; 100: “[...] il faudroit d'aussi gros volumes pour marquer les caracteres des passions dans le discours, que pour exprimer ceux que les mêmes passions peignent sur le visage [...]” Charles Le Brun provides such an inventory of facial expressions in his *Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière* at the Académie royale de peinture et sculpture (1698). Boileau, *Art poétique*, Chant IV, ll. 223-227: “Pour moi, qui, jusqu'ici nourri dans la satire, / N'ose encore manier la trompette et la lyre, / Vous me verrez pourtant, dans ce champ glorieux, / Vous animer du moins de la voix et des yeux.”

<sup>108</sup> Maître, *Les précieuses*, 465-466.



setting had recourse to a number of publications providing advice on rapid, intense memorization. In *De la connoissance des bons livres*, Sorel encourages his readers to inform themselves actively about subjects evoked daily in society, and to get their hands on books that discuss these subjects in detail “qu’on relise souvent, & dont l’on tasche chaque jour d’apprendre quelque chose par cœur, afin d’éprouver si l’on s’en pourra servir dans la conversation ordinaire.”<sup>109</sup> Sorel also mentions mnemonic devices (“la mémoire artificielle”) used to retain what one reads “dans le mesme ordre que vous l’avez appris.”<sup>110</sup> However, Sorel warns that this type of memorization does not facilitate rapid recollection in the free, unpredictable flow of conversation. In *L’art de plaire dans la conversation*, Ortigue de Vaumorière acknowledges the usefulness of a personal log in which one can record statements to be memorized for salon use. The practice seems to have been common in the seventeenth century:

Si vous souhaitez d’avoir des matières prêtes pour toutes sortes de conversations, vous ferez apparemment un recueil de toutes les choses remarquables que vous lirez, ou que vous entendrez dire. Vous rangerez des observations selon un ordre que vous vous établirez. D’un côté vous mettrez les événemens funestes, les trônes renversez [...] D’autre part vous amasserez les succès les plus heureux [...] C’est de rappeler tous les soirs les idées de ce que vous aurez entendu dire de plus agréable, & de plus instructif.<sup>111</sup>

Likewise, when Méré recalls converting his friend Blaise Pascal from a pedantic mathematician into a sensitive and sensible interlocutor, he commends Pascal’s desire to record useful “observations” for future conversations:

[...] nous ne pensions à rien moins qu’à le desabuser: cependant nous lui parlions de bonne foy. Deux ou trois jours s’estant écoulés de la sorte, il eut quelque defiance de ses sentimens, et ne faisant plus qu’écouter, ou qu’interroger, pour s’éclaircir sur les sujets qui se presentoient, *il avoit des tablettes qu’il tiroit de temps en temps, où il mettoit quelque observation.* Cela fut bien

---

<sup>109</sup> Sorel, *De la connoissance des bons livres*, 270.

<sup>110</sup> Sorel, *De la connoissance des bons livres*, 264.

<sup>111</sup> Ortigue de Vaumorière, *L’art de plaire dans la conversation*, 251, 256.

remarquable, qu'avant que nous fussions arrivés à P. il ne disoit presque rien qui ne fust bon [...]<sup>112</sup>

When reciting the contents of this log, one must not sound as if one were reading out loud. In his “Discours de la conversation,” Méré warns against speaking in the style of an “Auteur [...] parce que l’avantage de bien parler semble estre un don naturel [...] Ceux [...] qui ne font que réciter, ne sont pas d’un aimable entretien.”<sup>113</sup> Méré questions the “beauty” of a well performing, impressive memory during conversation: “il vaut mieux donner jour à l’esprit que de remplir la mémoire.”<sup>114</sup> Natural conversation was thus clearly opposed to artful recitation. Even if one’s conversation were really extemporized, Sorel warns against too much ease and fluidity in delivery, for such qualities would erroneously imply recitation from memory:

Il se faut garder aussi de debiter trop promptement, & d’une suite continue tout ce que l’on sçait, comme si l’on avoit peur d’oublier à le dire; Cela pourroit faire croire qu’un tel Discours est étudié; On se persuade que ce qui est inventé à mesure qu’on le prononce, va avec plus de lenteur, & qu’il s’y trouve quelque inégalité en certains endroits.<sup>115</sup>

In the novel *La Précieuse* by de Pure, on the other hand, Melanire says of a salonnier’s “bons mots”: “il trioit avec assez de presence, mais si grossierement, & par un effort si visible, que la chose, quoy que bonne, dégoustoit incontinent.”<sup>116</sup> Only a little effort in conversation should appear in order to show that one is extemporizing, and not reciting from memory. Speaking “naturally” in a salon setting means neither too fluidly, too literally, too painstakingly, nor too carelessly. Is that natural? Even Méré, who believes in the reconciliation between “acting” and “being” natural in salon conversation, admits

<sup>112</sup> Méré, “Discours de l’Esprit,” 2:86. Emphasis mine.

<sup>113</sup> Méré, “Discours de la conversation,” 2:122-123.

<sup>114</sup> Méré, “Troisième Conversation,” 1:40.

<sup>115</sup> Sorel, *De la connoissance des bons livres*, 254-255.

<sup>116</sup> De Pure, *La Précieuse*, 1: 31.

that mental and verbal “presence” in conversation is sometimes an illusion created by the speaker: “Tout ce qu’on y dit de plus rare, quoique l’on ne le puisse avoir appris, que par des reflexions recherchées, doit se montrer naturel, et venir du sujet qui se presente.”<sup>117</sup>

It seems that only the truly *honnêtes gens* were exempt from the need to “act,” if such ideally sociable persons really existed.

Other types of memorization were deemed inappropriate for salon conversation. Scudéry and Jean-Baptiste Thiers discourage salonniers from reciting the jokes of another. A joke falls flat if it does not perfectly befit the speaker and the immediate situation.<sup>118</sup> Sorel maintains in *De la connoissance des livres* that certain methods of memorization used in public speaking are too ostentatious for the salon. He refers specifically to the “constellations” of the medieval theologian Raymond Lull, in which propositions represented by distinct symbols are arranged in different logical sequences in order to yield different conclusions. By memorizing these constellations of symbols, Sorel maintains that a person can speak at length about any topic that presents itself.<sup>119</sup> He insists that Lull’s constellations are particularly useful to a preacher or an orator who is given only a few hours to prepare a speech. Sorel complains, however, that certain people introduce these intricate constellations into their conversation to show off what they know, or rather, what they have hastily memorized. Such an impressive and

---

<sup>117</sup> Méré, “Discours IV: De la Delicatesse dans les choses et l’Expression,” 3:133.

<sup>118</sup> Scudéry, “*De l’air galant*” et autres *Conversations*, 111: “[...] on ne peut que mal imiter la raillerie d’un autre.” Thiers, *Traité des jeux et des divertissements*, 14: “Pour bien railler il faut railler sans affectation. La raillerie quelque noble & ingénieuse quelle soit, perd toute sa grace dès qu’elle paroît venir de loin, & être tirée comme à force de bras & de machines.”

<sup>119</sup> Sorel, *De la connoissance des bons livres*, 264-267.

imposing display of logical reasoning, recalling Montaigne's portrait of the pedant, never appears spontaneous in a conversation.

Ideally, memorization for conversation was involuntary and effortless. If Ortigue de Vaumorière encourages the use of a personal conversation log, he still believes in the memory's power to work independently of the will:

*S'il est bon de se préparer pour les Conversations ordinaires. La lecture que nous pouvons faire tous les jours, & le monde que nous voïons à tous moments, nous tiennent lieu d'une préparation insensible & continuelle, pour les Conversations où le hazard nous peut faire rencontrer. C'est par ces deux moyens que nôtre mémoire s'enrichit d'une infinité de connoissances, dont elle nous fait part ensuite dans les occasions où nous en pouvons avoir besoin.*<sup>120</sup>

In the introduction to his *Modèles de conversations pour les personnes polies*, Jean-Baptiste Morvan de Bellegarde discourages his readers from attempting to memorize his dialogues "parce que la Conversation ne demande rien d'étudié, ou de contraint; le hazard, les conjonctures, la situation des esprits qui composent le Cercle, doivent faire naître les sujets qu'on y traite."<sup>121</sup> He hopes that the readers will use his work to recall other readings and enjoy learning how a host of topics may be addressed in conversation. Similarly, René Bary's model conversations in *L'Esprit de cour* are not intended for rote memorization: "Quelques sueurs que mon Ouvrage m'ait cousté, je ne prétens point, cher Lecteur [...] qu'on affecte mes paroles [...] je prétens seulement qu'on relise mon Esprit de Cour, qu'on examine mes Entretiens, & que sur les ouvertures qu'ils donnent, les Provinciaux deviennent plus polis, & les Dames plus éclairées."<sup>122</sup> The texts provided by Morvan de Bellegarde and Bary are intended to be savored, read, and reread out of sheer enjoyment rather than for the specific purpose of memorization. Through this pleasure,

<sup>120</sup> Ortigue de Vaumorière, *L'art de plaire dans la conversation*, 249.

<sup>121</sup> Morvan de Bellegarde, *Modèles de conversations*, "Avertissement," n.p.

<sup>122</sup> Bary, "Advis au Lecteur" in *L'esprit de cour*, n.p.

pieces of text can be involuntarily assimilated and reproduced at the appropriate moment in conversation as one's own.

Though they differed in delivery, the arts of conversation and recitation from memory were governed by the same principles. Based on certain types of memorization, they nonetheless called for spontaneity, thus a presence of mind sensitive to the immediate social and discursive context. The performance of one's memory was ideally inspired by pleasure and carefully balanced between ease and effort, thus guaranteeing a certain naturalness. Spontaneous, "natural" recollection in salon society was thus a highly developed art form.

### ***Impromptu***

In salon culture, where spontaneity was a prized quality, poetic recitation was not only the fruit of recollection; it could also be (or appear to be) extemporized. Alain Génétiot, Maître, and other literary historians judge the poetic impromptu to have been a common pastime, an activity executed individually or collectively. More than a pastime, poetic recitation was a performance art, a veritable spectacle of creativity specific to the salon.

In many literary representations of salon gatherings, established poets are invited to improvise verses for the enjoyment of the other salonniers. The figure of the extemporizing poet is found in the first volume of *La Précieuse* by de Pure. The character Philonime is the quintessential *bel esprit*, capable of producing poetry calmly, effortlessly, and upon only a little reflection. In other representations of salon culture, the

wit of the *bel esprit* is tainted with vanity and affectation.<sup>123</sup> Seventeenth-century salonniers generally sought the company of those who appeared to be “prompts, vifs, brillans, feconds [...] dans les conversations, dans la promenade, dans la Ruelle.”<sup>124</sup> They could simultaneously engage in the processes of literary creation and salon socialization. The salonnières represented by de Pure in *La Prétieuse* are far less impressed by poets who compose privately and painstakingly. Their trouble is more worthy of “compassion” than praise, unlike the easy brilliance of *les beaux esprits*, as Sophronisbe explains:

[...] ie crois que les beaux esprits sont comme le Soleil; ils éclairent tous les jours, & produisent chaque jour quelque chose. La lumiere n'est pas tous les jours la mesme; les jours sont plus ou moins beaux, les effets plus ou moins ardents, plus prompts ou plus paresseux; mais au moins ils sont produits, ils sont échauffez dans le sein de la terre, & naissent en arbres & en herbes s'ils ne tournent en or ou en metal.<sup>125</sup>

The performance of spontaneous literary composition is specific to the salon setting, as

Philonime notes:

Je n'examine point la Comedie par l' Auteur, encore moins par la peine de l' Auteur. Je tâche de percer & de penetrer le merite de la piece, l'esprit & la conduite de l' Auteur, & ne m'avise point si Corneille a esté plus long-temps à composer le Cid, que le Comediens à le reciter [...] Mais

---

<sup>123</sup> One famous example is the character Trissotin in *Les Femmes savantes* by Molière. See also Scudéry, “Conversation de la Politesse” in *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets*, 128-129: a salonnier is said to compose poetry well “sans faire le bel esprit.” La Bruyère is perhaps the most virulent critic of those who claim to be *beaux esprits*. See La Bruyère, *Les Caractères*, 304-305: “Je nomme Eurypyle, et vous dites: ‘c’est un bel esprit,’ [...] je vous demande quel est l’atelier où travaille cet homme de métier, ce bel esprit? Quelle est son enseigne? À quel habit le reconnaît-on? [...] Eurypyle se pique-t-il d’être bel esprit? S’il est tel, vous me peignez un fat, qui met l’esprit en rotture, un âme vile et mécanique, à qui ni ce qui est beau, ni ce qui est esprit ne sauraient s’appliquer sérieusement; et s’il est vrai qu’il ne se pique de rien, je vous entends, c’est un homme sage et qui a de l’esprit; ne dites-vous pas encore du savatasse: ‘il est bel esprit,’ et ainsi du mauvais poète? Mais vous-même, vous croyez-vous sans aucun esprit? Et si vous en avez, c’est sans doute de celui qui est beau et convenable; vous voilà donc un bel esprit; ou s’il s’en faut peu que vous ne preniez ce nom pour une injure, continuez, j’y consens, de le donner à Eurypyle, et d’employer cette ironie comme les sots, sans le moindre discernement, ou comme les ignorants qu’elle console d’une certaine culture qui leur manque, et qu’ils ne voient que dans les autres.”

<sup>124</sup> De Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 1:146.

<sup>125</sup> De Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 1:143-144.

dans la conversation au contraire [...] [un] esprit prompt paye sur le champ; c'est de l'argent comptant, il n'y a point de remise.<sup>126</sup>

Here again appears the analogy between salon recitation and payment. Whereas Ortigue de Vaumorière compares the correlation between memory and recitation to “L’Intendant d’une Maison” spending the wealth he has accumulated, de Pure compares poetic improvisation to liquid money, immediately poured forth as soon as it is available. As the variable image of the sun also reveals, the excellence of the verses is of less consequence in this setting – money is money. The sun represents the salonnier’s inspiration yielding poetry that is at least as pleasant as plants, if not as precious as gold. It is the spontaneity of the creative gesture that counts. In an ideal salon impromptu, the poet performs his verses immediately upon their creation, exposing the fruits of his creativity as they occur to him.

Génetiot suspects the authenticity of salon impromptus, just as Maître denounces the extemporization of salon conversation. Génetiot contends that most often, salonniers prepared and perfected their verses beforehand, memorized them secretly, and pretended to extemporize them in front of others.<sup>127</sup> Reference to this practice of bad faith is made in *Les Chroniques du Samedi*, which recount the real gatherings in Scudéry’s salon: “Thrasile ensuite pressé par les dames de rimer à son tour, répondit par ces quatre vers [...] En même temps il protesta hautement qu’on ne le surprendrait plus, et qu’il ne lui arriverait point de marcher sans des impromptus de poche.”<sup>128</sup> In addition to the

---

<sup>126</sup> De Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 1:148-149.

<sup>127</sup> Génetiot, *Poétique du loisir mondain*, 423: “En outre, il arrive que les poèmes destinés à s’adapter aux circonstances de la conversation impromptue aient été préparés par avance et véritablement limés à loisir, même si l’auteur feint de ne pas le reconnaître.”

<sup>128</sup> Scudéry, *Chroniques du Samedi*, 172-174.

existence of such “pocket impromptus,” the ideas expressed by the abbé d’Aubignac in *La pratique du théâtre* seem to justify Génétiot’s skepticism. Rapid poetic composition by a salonnier goes against d’Aubignac’s conception of verisimilitude: in his opinion, poetic composition requires a period of concentration, of leisurely reflection away from society.<sup>129</sup> However, salon culture celebrated the ability of the *bel esprit* to compose promptly in the presence of others, so as not to disrupt the flow of social commerce.

It is difficult to either confirm or refute Génétiot’s suspicion. I surmise that spontaneous creativity was possible in the salon. De Pure’s character Philonime is asked by the lady Agathonte to spontaneously add a stanza to a poem he has composed for her, the subject of which she dictates.<sup>130</sup> In *Les Chroniques du Samedi*, the poet Paul Pellisson playfully invents a six-line poem based on what Scudéry has just said in their conversation.<sup>131</sup> Certain seventeenth-century writers complained about spontaneous creativity in the salon. Bégigne de Bacilly dislikes the practice of impromptus because spontaneity is used to excuse poor poetry by amateurs:<sup>132</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> Aubignac, *La pratique du théâtre*, 263-264: “[...] certes il est bien peu raisonnable qu’un prince, ou une grande dame au milieu d’un discours ordinaire s’avise de faire des vers lyriques, c’est à dire, s’avise de chanter, ou du moins de reciter une chanson [...] il eût fallu donner quelque loisir pour composer cette agréable plainte. Dans ces rencontres donc il faut que l’acteur ait disparu durant un intervalle d’acte au moins, afin qu’ouvrant l’acte suivant par des stances, ou les récitant dans la première scène qu’il y fera, il reste vray-semblable dans l’esprit des spectateurs, qu’estant éloigné, il s’est occupé à la méditation de son bon-heur, ou de son mal-heur, et qu’il a composé ces beaux vers.”

<sup>130</sup> De Pure, *La Précieuse*, 1:33: “Monsieur (en montrant Philonime) vient de me donner des preuves de la promptitude de son esprit. Il m’a fait ce second couplet sur le champ, & dans la pensée que je luy ay dite.”

<sup>131</sup> Scudéry, *Les Chroniques du Samedi*, 74 (note 54).

<sup>132</sup> The improvisation of poetry in a salon setting was not restricted to those who claimed or aspired to be professional poets. The distinction between “professional” and “amateur” poet was difficult to trace during this period, as Myriam Maître points out. (See Maître, *Les précieuses*, 235-238.) Seasoned poets like Philonime in *La Précieuse* claimed that they were not professionals, that their verses were only creative exercises serving to amuse themselves and their friends. (See De Pure, *La Précieuse*, 1:2.) Certain self-claimed amateurs composed poetry for their friends as frequently and as brilliantly as self-claimed professionals. The character Fenice in Scudéry’s “Conversation de la Politesse” describes a friend “qui sans faire le bel esprit fait fort agreablement des Vers, qu’il montre sans façon à ses Amis, mais dont il ne



C'est ce que j'ay appris d'un Seigneur aussi élevé par son Esprit que par sa Naissance & par sa Dignité, qui trouve fort à propos que c'est mal s'excuser de l'imperfection d'un Ouvrage de Poésie, en luy donnant le nom d'Impromptu, puisque sans doute il vaut mieux bien travailler à loisir, que de faire mal les choses à la hâte, & que d'ordinaire les Gens à Impromptu sont fort peu capables de bien faire, quelque temps qu'ils y employent.<sup>133</sup>

Boileau concurs in his *Art poétique* that poetry is at its best when composed slowly and carefully, not on the spot: "Travaillez à loisir, quelque ordre qui vous presse, / Et ne vous piquez point d'une folle vitesse; / Un style si rapide, et qui court en rimant, / Marque moins trop d'esprit, que peu de jugement."<sup>134</sup> It seems then that not every impromptu had been hiding in a salonier's pocket, as Génétiot suggests.

The composition of poetry in the salon was not a private affair, but a performance art. The impromptu juxtaposed the process of composition and the performance of recitation, rendering them virtually indistinguishable. Salon culture ideally called for interlocutors who were entirely present, who spontaneously (re)produced poetry without preparation, who were self-confident enough to expose "in real time" the workings of their memory or creativity, and who were "honest" enough, in all senses of the word, to clearly distinguish between the two when they recited their verses.

The salon promoted the composition and recitation of poetry without biting one's nails or grimacing with effort.<sup>135</sup> Ideally, it wanted to be an Arcadia attracting *les beaux*

---

se pare pas en public." (See Scudéry, *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets*, 128-129.) Whatever status the poet vindicated, it is undeniable that the composition of poetry was a generalized practice during the seventeenth century, to the disappointment of many men of letters. See Faret, *L'Honneste homme*, 31: "Pour faire des vers, c'est un exercice plus agreable que necessaire, et qui par la malice des ignorans est tombé dans un mespris, qui devoit couvrir de confusion nostre siecle [...] La principale origine de cet abus vient de tant de mal-heureux faiseurs de vers, qui profanent la poésie, et entre les mains desquels elle perd tout son prix, et toute sa gloire."

<sup>133</sup> Bacilly, *L'Art de bien chanter*, 9.

<sup>134</sup> Boileau, *L'Art poétique*, Chant I, ll. 163-166.

<sup>135</sup> See Scudéry, *Les Chroniques du Samedi*, 168: "Mais nos héros & nos héroïnes ne s'attachèrent qu'aux madrigaux; jamais il n'en fut tant fit ni si promptement [...] Tout s'y faisait gaiement, & sans grimace. Personne n'en ronges ses ongles et n'en perdait le rire ni le parler."

*esprits* for whom poetry was as natural as ordinary speech. In reality, the impromptu was understood to be a pleasurable, spontaneous activity that nonetheless demanded some effort. This slight effort is represented in “*Les Jeux servant de preface à Mathilde*” by Scudéry. The salonniers play a game in which everyone is given a unique challenge to perform spontaneously. Cleocrite is particularly lucky at this game: asked to produce a madrigal, she immediately recites one that she happens to have recently learned by heart.<sup>136</sup> Meriandre is given a more difficult challenge: the improvisation and recitation of an elegy. When he is informed of the task he responds, “j’en viendray peut-estre à bout.” The suspense only heightens as the group watches Meriandre silently walk to a window facing a garden. Leaning on the window for a moment, short enough not to break entirely from the conversation circle and long enough not to throw suspicion on the spontaneity of his endeavor, Meriandre gazes at the garden and seems to draw inspiration from this *locus amoenus*. He returns to the circle to recite eighteen lovely verses with perfect rhyme and meter to the amazement of everyone.<sup>137</sup> In Scudéry’s text, the contrast between Cleocrite’s ease and Meriandre’s effort suggests that he is not faking his improvisation. The casual walk to the window is a narrative detail serving to establish not only the realism of Scudéry’s fictional salon but also the unfeigned spontaneity of Meriandre’s performance.

Thus, the salon practice of impromptu was a performance art entailing not only the recitation of verse but the representation of the creative process itself. This process

---

<sup>136</sup> Scudéry, “*Les Jeux servant de preface à Mathilde*,” 62: “[...] c’étoit à [Cleocrite] à dire un Madrigal; elle en eut une extrême joye, & se hasta de reciter celuy qui suit, que personne de cette aimable troupe n’avoit encore vue.”

<sup>137</sup> Scudéry, “*Les Jeux servant de preface à Mathilde*,” 74.

was supposed to be spontaneous, only slightly laborious, and never completely divorced from social interaction. The theater was associated with a more arduous process of poetic composition requiring concentration and solitude. Whereas the *bel esprit* drew inspiration from conversation, the dramatic poet required silence to compose. Such earnestness and effort was also commonly attributed to actors in performance. Salonniers sought to avoid this affectation by merging literary composition and performance with the free exchange of sociability.

As my first three chapters have shown, the aesthetic and ethical ideals of the performing salonnier were distinct from the stereotypes attributed to the stage performer: while the professional performer was associated with the vices of affectation, immodesty, crudeness, malice, and dissimulation, the salonnier aspired toward an ideal of “naturalness” combining dignity, *honnêteté*, spontaneity, and shared pleasure between interlocutors. This shared pleasure implied enjoyment, open emotivity, and engagement in the current conversation, as well as transparency when presenting one’s literary culture and creativity. If a certain degree of self-constraint and dissimulation was inevitable among salonniers, as the art of gallantry most clearly demonstrates, unfeigned spontaneity was thought to endow social performance with a special grace. Whether in conversation, a song, a reading, an impersonation, a dramatic enactment, or a poetic recitation, they recognized that their nature could be polished and embellished, but never entirely dissimulated. Contrary to what historians of seventeenth-century sociability generally presume, salonniers believed that it was possible to reconcile the dictates of *la bienséance* with the finer parts of their nature.

#### 4. Between the Salon and the Stage: Maintenon's *Conversations*

This chapter will focus on a unique pedagogical practice combining conversation and dramatic performance, bringing to the forefront the similarities and tensions between these two arts in the seventeenth century. The practice took place at the female boarding school L'École de Saint-Cyr, co-founded by Louis XIV and his second wife Françoise d'Aubigné, marquise de Maintenon in 1684. Maintenon was the school's director and she required the students of each class to memorize and perform for small groups of visitors salon-style conversations that she composed. Critics since the nineteenth century have tended to approach these *Conversations* strictly as tools of indoctrination. They have maintained that Maintenon made her conversation characters promote certain moral and social values with the expectation that the memorization and performance of her scripts would result in the students' assimilation of these values. Though the *Conversations* undoubtedly served this purpose, their pedagogical, aesthetic, psychological, and institutional value at Saint-Cyr transcended simple indoctrination.

The synthesis between conversational and dramatic arts was paradoxical in a school for young ladies: the art of conversation honored women, while the theater did just the opposite. Even though the salon was a social practice that favored mixed company, it was often presided over by women, or by a "feminine" sensibility to which one's speech and behavior catered. In contrast, as we have seen throughout the preceding chapters on salon performance practices, the theater was a source of fearful fascination for women who longed to perform but who feared being compared to stage actresses of unscrupulous morals and unabashed affectations. Maintenon's students were neither seasoned salonnières nor seasoned actresses, and her *Conversations* did not represent them as such.

Rather, these dialogues were exercises in adaptation: the art of conversation among adults was adapted to the verbal, intellectual, and imaginative capacities of young ladies, the “free play” of conversation was adapted to the economy of dramatic representation, and the artifices of stage acting were adapted to the ostensible naturalness of conversation. Maintenon’s pedagogical goals seem to have been threefold. First, she paradoxically used dramatic performance, a formalized art of imitation, to teach the students the nonperformance art of conversation. Secondly, she used the “natural” discursive style of salon conversation to teach the students how to behave without affectation. Thirdly, she used these performed conversations to flatter the image of the students and the institution in the minds of onlookers and of the students themselves. These *Conversations* reveal a side of Maintenon that is to this day overshadowed by her image as Louis XIV’s matronly, austere wife who forced her pious manners on the king and the entire Court. The author of the *Conversations*, on the contrary, demonstrates a playful sense of humor, a keen understanding of her students’ psychology, and an insinuating approach to institutional discipline.

### ***Salon Culture at Saint-Cyr***

Before studying the combined arts of conversation and dramatic performance in Maintenon’s *Conversations*, it is first necessary to situate this practice in the historical context of Saint-Cyr’s evolving curriculum and culture, particularly in relation to the other dramatic activities of the students as well as the school’s ambivalence vis-à-vis salon culture. Maintenon’s *Conversations* participated in a pedagogical program serving to prepare the students for life in salon society by freely appropriating elements of it, while at the same time teaching the students to maintain an ironic distance from it.

The establishment in 1686 of La Royale Maison de Saint-Louis, otherwise known as L'École de Saint-Cyr,<sup>1</sup> was associated with the public service mission underlying the creation of the hôtel des Invalides a decade earlier: to honor and aid French soldiers who had fought valiantly in the king's army. While the hôtel des Invalides provided the physically infirm with medical care and religious guidance, La Royale Maison de Saint-Louis was a charitable institution devoted to the upbringing and education in a pious yet secular setting of girls whose fathers were injured, destitute, or deceased soldiers belonging to the nobility. Unlike other boarding schools for girls in France during this period, invariably convent schools and predominantly of the Ursuline Order, Saint-Cyr maintained an atmosphere of religious piety while actively preparing its students for life in society: to be ladies in waiting at court serving "des princesses et des dames de qualités" or to be good wives, mothers, and household managers, and in the meantime to be good daughters upon their return home "après une parfaite éducation."<sup>2</sup>

At its inception, Saint-Cyr was the first boarding school belonging to the State and not to a specific religious order, though many of its students were Catholics recently converted from Protestantism,<sup>3</sup> particularly after the revocation in 1685 of the Edict of Nantes. The women who taught at Saint-Cyr, referred to as the "Maîtresses" or the "Dames," underwent a novitiate and took religious vows in order to enter the

---

<sup>1</sup> Originally located in Ruël, the school was transferred first to the château de Noisy in 1683 (or 1684) and finally in the village of Saint-Cyr close to Versailles, where its official inauguration finally took place in 1686.

<sup>2</sup> Ms. n.a.f. 10677: "Histoire de la Maison roiale de S. Cyr par Madame d'Eperville," *Constitutions de la communauté de S. Louis établie à St Cyr*, "Avant propos."

<sup>3</sup> Piéjus, *Le théâtre des demoiselles*, 34. Maintenon herself underwent the same conversion during her youth.

“communauté” of Saint-Louis.<sup>4</sup> Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet and François de Salignac de La Mothe-Fénelon both served as counselors to Maintenon and confessors to the students. The students, ages seven to eighteen, were grouped into four classes corresponding each to a specific color ribbon (in ascending order: red, green, yellow, blue). Not unlike convent schools, Saint-Cyr taught its students both religious and secular subjects; however, it boasted better quality instruction. The youngest classes underwent catechism in addition to studying reading, writing, grammar, counting, and biblical history. Then they learned music, general history, geography, and certain elements of classical mythology. The older students studied French language, religion and morality, drawing, and advanced music. In preparation for domestic life, the students were also taught how to manage household budgets and maintain relations with servants. Extracurricular activities featured needlework, lessons on morality, voiced readings, whether sacred or profane,<sup>5</sup> and dance.<sup>6</sup> Dramatic activities, whether rehearsals for fully

---

<sup>4</sup> One of the instructors at Saint-Cyr left behind copious memoirs that were never published, entitled “Mémoires de ce qui s’est passé de plus remarquable depuis l’établissement de la Maison de Saint-Cyr. Première partie: Ses commencements jusqu’à l’année mil sept cent quarante.” The manuscript carries the catalogue number Rés. F. 629-630 and is located in the municipal library of Versailles. The identity of the author remains a mystery. The “Avant-Propos” of the memoirs opens in the following manner: “J’entreprends de rédiger et de réunir en corps d’histoire suivie des mémoires secrets dont je suis dépositaire [...] je suis une des premières professes de notre saint établissement, et [...] j’ai vécu longtemps sous la conduite, sous les yeux même de notre sage institutrice.\*” The asterix points to the following note: “\*C’est La mère du Pérou qui parle icy comme témoin oculaire des faits contenus en ce premier volume, dont elle avoit laissée quelques notes, qui ont été suivies avec exactitude.” Therefore, these memoirs were written not by Catherine Travers du Pérou herself, as many historians suggest, but by another whose text is based “avec exactitude” on the few notes left behind by du Pérou. Moreover, this manuscript could not have been written by Mme du Pérou who died in 1748 at the age of 83, for in them is mentioned *Les loisirs de Mme de Maintenon*, the first edition of Maintenon’s *Conversations*, published in 1757. For the sake of simplification, however, the author of Rés. F. 629-630 will hereafter be referred to as du Pérou, for her writings did inspire their composition.

<sup>5</sup> In the 1680’s, the instructor Madame de Brinon endeavored to occupy the students during recreation with voiced readings. She began with the lives of the Fathers of the Church but feared that such readings would sound too serious or boring to the students who otherwise used recreation to relax, play, and talk among themselves. She therefore switched to more amusing fare, most notably the comedies of Molière, which were judged by Maintenon to be inappropriate and even dangerous for young, innocent ears. The voiced readings of Molière were therefore eliminated during recreation. See Rés. F. 629-630, 1:60-61.

staged productions or performances of simple skits, were often scheduled during the students' recreation time.

The "parfaite éducation" that Maintenon proposed at Saint-Cyr combined religious and secular elements into a comprehensive, well-balanced curriculum. It also endeavored to maintain a healthy distance from the excesses of both convent and salon cultures. Maintenon sought to instill the girls entrusted to her care with an "irreproachable" sense of religious piety and virtue enabling them to remain "détachées du monde,"<sup>7</sup> "le monde" being understood as both polite society and the ensemble of worldly concerns. Maintenon herself was represented in the teachers' memoirs as the model of a society woman whose many occupations at court never weakened her devotion nor her fundamental indifference toward the vanities of sociability. Her aim was not to make her students flee polite society, but to elevate their minds and their hearts in its midst through the contemplation of God.<sup>8</sup> Maintenon saw no contradiction

---

<sup>6</sup> Ms. n.a.f. 10678: *Mémoire de ce qui s'observe dans la royale maison de Saint-Louis*, fol. 12: "On la fait employer le plus ordinairement [la récréation], surtout dans l'hiver à danser, toutes apprenent le menuet, elles ont quantités de menuets figures à 4, 8, 12, ou 16. Et chaque classe fait une répétition de ces danses tous les ans devant les Dames et les Dlls."

<sup>7</sup> du Pérou, Rés. F. 629-630: 1:33, 57.

<sup>8</sup> Her perspective was thus consistent with that of Saint François de Sales in his *Introduction à la vie dévote*, a compulsory reading throughout the seventeenth century for any young woman preparing her entry into "le monde." See in particular his "Préface" in *Œuvres*, 24: "[...] ainsi peut une âme vigoureuse et constante vivre au monde sans recevoir aucune humeur mondaine, trouver des sources d'une douce piété au milieu des ondes amères de ce siècle, et voler entre les flammes des convoitises terrestres sans brûler les ailes des sacrés désirs de la vie dévote." Maintenon frequently requested that Saint François de Sales's works be read and discussed among the students and teachers of Saint-Cyr. See du Pérou, Rés. F. 629-630, 1:58-59: "elle aimoit sur tout les œuvres de St François de Salles, elle y trouvoit un fond d'instruction si droite et si raisonnable sur la vraie dévotion qu'elle ne se lassoit point de le lire. Elle ne s'arrêtoit point à la beauté du langage, mais à l'utilité et à l'onction solide qui la portoit à Dieu." See also Maintenon, *Extraits de ses lettres*, 19: "Tâchez de leur faire aimer saint François de Sales: ses livres sont solides, et mènent à la plus grande perfection avec des manières douces" and Maintenon, *Lettres historiques et édifiantes*, 1:175: "Lisez, je vous prie, les lettres de saint François de Sales, elles sont dans ma petite bibliothèque; il y en a plusieurs à des personnes scrupuleuses. Vous êtes assez solide à présent pour passer par-dessus le mauvais langage, et pour démêler le bon sens et la droiture de tout ce qu'il écrit."



between the cultivation of faith and that of reason. She insisted explicitly on “la raison,” understood as the exercise of sound judgment in a spirit of moral rectitude, as opposed to “l’esprit,” or the quality of brightness which she associated with the frivolities of salon culture, namely witty repartee, affected verbal eloquence, and the accumulation of “de vaines connoissances.”<sup>9</sup> In a word, she did not want her students to act like *beaux esprits*.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Maintenon abhorred the morose sobriety of convent education. She was convinced that learning could not occur under duress or through long-winded instruction. It was only possible through lessons and activities that were diverse, succinct, and even fun, according to the *docere et placere* of Horace, the pedagogical theories of her counselor Fénelon,<sup>11</sup> and the principles of salon culture itself, namely pleasure, open dialogue, and the forestalling of boredom.<sup>12</sup> Despite her wariness of salon culture, Maintenon recognized its utility in rendering her instruction more pleasurable and effective. She thus introduced into her curriculum certain elements of that culture in a manner that was consistent with her principal educational goal, to train her students to become “reasonable” members of society.

---

<sup>9</sup> Du Pérou, Rés. F. 629-630, 1:57. See also Jacquemin, *Livres et jeunes filles nobles à Saint-Cyr (1686-1793)*, 142: “Elle met en garde les maîtresses des novices contre l’abondance des questions posées par les jeunes filles. Une telle curiosité ne peut être tolérée: l’enseignement dispensé ne doit s’en tenir qu’au nécessaire, évitant toutes les matières qui relèvent du frivole, du divertissement.”

<sup>10</sup> See note 123 in my third chapter.

<sup>11</sup> Lougee, “Noblesse, Domesticity, and Social Reform” and Piéjus, *Le théâtre des demoiselles*, 53. See also du Pérou, Rés. F. 629-630, 1:57: “Elle vouloit d’ailleurs que l’Education fut simple, quoi que noble, douce et ferme, qu’on inspirat la piété plus par insinuation que par force” and Ms. n.a.f. 10678, *Mémoire de ce qui s’observe dans la royale maison de Saint-Louis*, fol. 7: “On doit toujours payer de la douceur avant d’en venir aux punitions [...] Il faut diversifier leurs instructions, les faire courtes, parce qu’elles sont fréquentes et même les égayer souvent, il faut se servir de tout jusques dans leurs jeux pour former leur raison.”

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Paul Desprat, *Madame de Maintenon (1636-1719) ou le prix de la réputation* (Paris: Perrin, 2003), 267: “Cette manière d’enseigner doit beaucoup au siècle, à l’héritage de la conversation des ruelles mais aussi à la coquetterie qui porte haut l’art de séduire. Empirisme là aussi et qui confère à l’enseignement le ton des sociétés dans lesquelles, plus tard, les Demoiselles auront à tenir leur rang.”

For example, she composed skits illustrating proverbs and offering moral lessons for her students to act out during recreation. Represented characters were both male and female, nobles and servants, and each skit revolved around the exemplary or irresponsible behavior of one or more of them, serving to represent the proverb. The practice of illustrating proverbs seems to have been inspired by the “Jeu des Histoire ou fables racontées sur chaque Proverbe,” a salon game described by Charles Sorel in his

*Récréations galantes:*

L'on peut faire choisir à chacun son Proverbe, & la-dessus l'on vous obligera de conter quelque Histoire ou quelque fable sur ce sujet, comme si l'on a dit, *qui trop embrasse mal estraint*, l'on doit conter là-dessus l'Histoire de quelque homme qui a eu plusieurs desseins, & n'en a pû faire reussir aucun, soit de quelque avaricieux, qui a voulu avoir trop de richesse & est devenu gueux, ou de quelque ambitieux qui ne pouvant se saouler d'honneurs, est tombé dans l'infamie[...]<sup>13</sup>

In Sorel's version of this game, the proverb is not enacted by multiple speakers, but recounted by a single speaker. The storyteller is free to dip into Aesop's *Fables* and “des Poètes, telles qu'il y en a dans l'*Iliade* ou l'*Odyssée* d'Homere, ou dans les *Metamorphoses* d'Ovide.”<sup>14</sup> At Saint-Cyr, such allusions to antiquity were negatively associated with the affectation of the *bel esprit*.<sup>15</sup> The proverb cited by Sorel, “qui trop embrasse mal estraint,” is represented in a skit by Maintenon featuring contemporary, ordinary situations without literary overtones. As per Sorel's first suggestion, a nobleman M. de Cabagnac begins by telling his close friend M. de Nemours how he

<sup>13</sup> Sorel, *Récréations galantes*, 98-99.

<sup>14</sup> Sorel, *Récréations galantes*, 99.

<sup>15</sup> Du Pérou condemns another teacher at Saint-Cyr for exposing the students to such literature: “Cette Dame avoit de l'esprit et peut estre trop de science pour une fille, elle crut très bien faire d'apprendre aux Dllles quelque chose de l'antiquité come la Fable, les histoires profanes, ce qui regardoit les Philosophes, les Poètes et choses semblables, il n'étoit question alors que d'esprit, et de bel esprit, on se piquoit d'en avoir, et de vouloir savoir mille choses vaines et curieuses [...] une partie des Dllles de la classe Bleuë étoient devenuës pédantes, ridicules et insupportables par la haute opinion qu'elles avoient d'elles memes, et par leurs airs de suffisance.” See Rés. F. 629-630, 1: 112.

pursues several ambitions at the same time and cannot succeed in any of them. De Nemours asks de Cabagnac, “Quoi! Vous voulez être courtisan, officier et gentilhomme campagnard? [...] Avec tout ce que vous venez de me dire, vous traitez un mariage?”<sup>16</sup> In the following scene, Mlle de Valence tells her friend Mme de Mandon how far she wants to push her religious zeal: “je veux me mettre dans une chambre seule; je n’en sortirai que pour aller à l’église; je me servirai toute seule: il me faudra peu de chose, je compte de jeûner quatre fois la semaine; je ne porterai point de linge; je coucherai sur la dure; je lirai, prierai et travaillerai tout le jour.”<sup>17</sup> In a subsequent scene between *raisonneurs*, Mme de Mandon tells M. de Nemours how the excessiveness of Mlle de Valence’s ambition has turned her against piety altogether: “Elle a entrepris au-dessus de ses forces, et la voilà dégoûtée, changeant de conduite, vêtue d’incarnat et déchaînée pour tous les divertissements.”<sup>18</sup> This proverb enactment seems to have served as an apology of Saint-Cyr itself, where piety was never as austere or as ostentatious as in a convent, and where the students learned to be “détachées du monde” without having to retreat from it like nuns. By inviting her students to perform this skit, Maintenon gave them a taste of salon performance culture while teaching them to curb their ambition.

Still, just as learned literary allusions were avoided, the sheer fun of acting was not pushed too far either. Sorel’s purely narrative game was converted by Maintenon into a mixed narrative-mimetic representation. The behavior in question was generally recounted by her characters and not represented through gestures and physical actions.

---

<sup>16</sup> Maintenon, *Extraits de ses lettres*, 271.

<sup>17</sup> Maintenon, *Extraits de ses lettres*, 272.

<sup>18</sup> Maintenon, *Extraits de ses lettres*, 274.

Sorel did evoke a dramatic version of the game in which the proverb could be illustrated through “une espece de Comedie, ou de Farce.”<sup>19</sup> By focusing on discourse rather than on action in her skits, Maintenon evaded any urge among her students to indulge in physical humor.

Maintenon’s *Conversations* similarly offered instruction while giving her students a taste of salon culture through the controlled practice of enactment. Students were expected to read, memorize, and perform during their recreation these dialogues composed for each class. They were intended exclusively for use at Saint-Cyr and it was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that they were first published, posthumously.<sup>20</sup> They entailed several unnamed characters representing the students themselves. In the course of each dialogue, a topic concerning morality (e.g., generosity, gratefulness, pride, righteousness, good faith), sociability (raillery, *agréments*, looking pretty, conversations, gossip, reputation), general behavior (indiscretion, constraint, emulation) or an aspect of their future lives (work, the hassles of marriage, constraint in all walks of life) was discussed and finally judged in accordance with the values that Maintenon sought to impart. The manner in which each topic was discussed was just as

---

<sup>19</sup> Sorel, *Les Récréations galantes*, 102-103, 105: “Quand l’on voudra donc représenter quelques Proverbes, la plupart des personnes de la compagnie s’estant retirées à un bout de la salle, joueront une espece de Comedie, ou de Farce avec des paroles & des actions telles qu’il leur plaira [...] Tout cela se fit avec des discours propres à l’histoire, sans que l’on profere le Proverbe que l’on veut exprimer, & cependant il y a un de la compagnie qui n’a point participé au conseil & au dessein de ces beaux Comédiens. Lequel envoie toute la force de son esprit à ses yeux & à ses oreilles pour observer leurs action, & leurs paroles, & tâcher de les expliquer si adroitement qu’il en puisse tirer le Proverbe que l’on veut figurer.”

<sup>20</sup> Under the title *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, the *Conversations* were published by Duchesne in 1757 and re-edited two times thereafter. The nineteenth century produced the most numerous editions of Maintenon’s *Conversations*, presented either by Louis Jean Nicolas Monmerqué, Octave Gréard, or Émile Faguet. A definitive critical edition of these dialogues, however, has yet to be established.

important as the conclusion drawn at the end of the conversation, and this manner of conversing could only be learned through practice, as Maintenon explains:

Je n'ai fait les conversations que pour vous apprendre à vous entretenir ensemble, à savoir disputer sans vous quereller. Si tout le monde était d'abord du même avis, il n'y aurait presque rien à dire. C'est ce qui m'a fait mettre des sentiments si différents, surtout dans la conversation Du mensonge. La manière de converser ne s'apprend pas comme des notes, mais l'habitude fait qu'on l'acquiert insensiblement.<sup>21</sup>

The art of conversation, according to Maintenon, could not be learned by memorizing notes taken from theoretical writings like those of the chevalier de Méré, François de Grenaille, or Jacques Du Bosc ("La manière de converser ne s'apprend pas comme des notes"). The performance of Maintenon's *Conversations* at Saint-Cyr entailed a unique pedagogical approach to the art of conversation because it combined practice ("l'habitude") and memorization, not of notes taken by the students, but of scripts composed by herself. Though the memorization of dialogues was considered inappropriate for adults preparing for imminent conversations (see my previous chapter), it was a viable means of acquiring the art of conversation gradually, "insensiblement" in the flower of one's youth.

Primary documentation regarding the dates of Maintenon's *Conversations* is regrettably sparse, and subsequent critical studies offer conflicting hypotheses. In general, the composition of these texts is thought to have been inspired by Madeleine de Scudéry's *Conversations* published in the 1680's. Scudéry's *Conversations* were also used in some manner to instruct the students at Saint-Cyr; it is even likely that her *Nouvelles conversations de morale* were composed at Maintenon's request before being

---

<sup>21</sup> This valuable citation is found in Prévot, *La première institutrice de France*, 220. Regrettably, Prévot does not specify its source. He seems to imply that it is found in the manuscript memoirs of Mme du Pérou (Rés. F 629-630); however, that source does not contain the citation in question. I have not been able to locate this passage in Maintenon's *Instructions aux classes*, either in manuscript or in the edited versions (e.g., *Extraits de ses lettres*).

published in 1688.<sup>22</sup> In the manuscript memoirs of one of Saint-Cyr's original teachers, Maintenon's *Conversations* are evoked in the chapter corresponding to the years 1687-1688.<sup>23</sup> This period is corroborated by Jean Racine's "Preface" to the first publication of *Esther* in 1689. Racine explains that even before the commission of this biblical tragedy by Maintenon for performance by her students in 1689, they were spending their recreation time performing conversations.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Scudéry's and Maintenon's *Conversations* seem to have been studied concurrently, at least until the reform of the school around 1691.<sup>25</sup> The circumstances surrounding the reform are detailed in a frequently cited letter by Maintenon addressed to one of her senior teachers.<sup>26</sup> She complains of the students' penchant toward ungraciousness when they speak among themselves: affectation, talkativeness, arrogance, and spiteful rivalry and raillery. She

---

<sup>22</sup> This volume of Scudéry's *Conversations* contains an oblique reference to Saint-Cyr in its dedicatory poem "La Morale au Roy": "*Je fus pourtant, Grande Roy, la fidelle compagne / De Saint Louis, de Charlemagne; / Je fis le célèbre destin / Et d'Auguste, & de Constantin, / Et par mille actions d'éternelle mémoire, / Vostre gloire sera ma gloire.*" Emphasis mine. It also features an entire conversation entitled "Description de Saint-Cyr."

<sup>23</sup> Du Pérou, Rés. F 629-630, 1: 70.

<sup>24</sup> Jean Racine, *Esther* (Paris: D. Thierry, 1689), n.p.

<sup>25</sup> Most historians since the nineteenth century have lent credence to the theory that Maintenon's *Conversations* succeeded those of Scudéry. In 1856, Théophile Lavallée notes in his edition of *Lettres historiques et édifiantes*, 1: 12-13: "Mlle de Scudéry a fait encore dix volumes de *Conversations sur divers sujets, Conversations morales*, etc., qui ont paru de 1680 à 1690. Ils eurent un succès très-grand et très-mérité. Les deux volumes qui parurent en 1690 avaient été faits à la demande de Mme de Maintenon, et destinés aux demoiselles de Saint-Cyr. Ce fut en effet l'une des lectures habituelles de ces demoiselles jusqu'à l'époque où l'éducation donnée à Saint-Cyr fut réformée et rendue plus sévère. Alors Mme de Maintenon substitua aux *Conversations* de Mlle de Scudéry d'autres *Conversations* qu'elle fit elle-même, et qui sont très supérieures aux premières." (Incidentally, no volumes of Scudéry's *Conversations* were published in 1690.) Other historians have followed Lavallée's lead. According to Octave Gréard's "Introduction" to *Madame de Maintenon. Extraits de ses lettres*, Maintenon had asked Scudéry for "modèles de *Conversations*" until 1689 before composing her own. Similarly, Elizabeth Goldsmith claims that Scudéry's *Conversations* were studied at Saint-Cyr prior to 1691, and those of Maintenon thereafter.

<sup>26</sup> This letter is dated September 20, 1691. According to Théophile Lavallée's edition, *Lettres historiques et édifiantes*, the letter is addressed to Mme de Monfort, while Octave Gréard identifies the addressee as Mme de Fontaines in *Extraits de ses lettres*. Du Pérou cites a portion of this letter to an unnamed "maîtresse de classe" in Rés. F. 629-630, 1: 113-114.

realizes that her desire to temper salon culture with convent culture in a single educational system made her forsake “une éducation simple et chrétienne”: “Nous avons voulu éviter les petitessees de certains couvents, et Dieu nous punit de cette hauteur.”<sup>27</sup> Under the tutelage of the abbé des Marais, bishop of Chartres, Saint-Cyr was thereafter oriented towards a more austere and pious educational policy, necessitating the elimination of worldly texts distracting the students from prayer, and culminating in the school’s adhesion in 1692 to the Rule of St. Augustine.<sup>28</sup> The literary historian Elizabeth Goldsmith posits that the students’ exposure to Scudéry’s *Conversations* may have led to behavioral problems instigating the reform.<sup>29</sup> Her theory is supported by the fact that while Maintenon continued to compose her *Conversations* after 1691,<sup>30</sup> those of Scudéry

---

<sup>27</sup> It is in Gréard’s version of the letter, the longest, that Maintenon regrets her arrogant condescendence vis-à-vis convent schools, which negatively influenced her students: “Il faut encore défaire nos filles de ce tour d’esprit railleur que je leur ai donné, et que je connais présentement très opposé à la simplicité; c’est un raffinement de l’orgueil qui dit par ce tour de raillerie ce qu’il n’oserait dire sérieusement.”

<sup>28</sup> Girard, “Le système éducatif à Saint-Cyr,” 154: “1691 constitue l’année charnière, à partir de laquelle va s’opérer la transformation de la maison royale de Saint-Louis d’institut séculier en régulier [...] Les raisons politiques du roi (relations avec le Saint-Siège) et de Mme de Maintenon (assurer la pérennité de l’établissement en le plaçant, outre l’égide du trône, sous celle de l’Eglise) sont décisives [...] Dès 1692, les Filles de Saint-Louis acceptent la règle augustinienne. [...] Les nouvelles constitutions sont publiées le 3 mars 1694, et l’habit devient de règle à partir d’avril 1707.”

<sup>29</sup> Goldsmith, “Excess and Euphoria in Madeleine de Scudéry’s *Conversations*,” 66.

<sup>30</sup> Daniel Roche claims that at Saint-Cyr, “les livres de musique, motets, cantiques, extraits d’opéras, œuvres de Lully, de Campra ou de Clérambault sont dans les bibliothèques de classe.” See *Les Républicains des Lettres* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), 366. Maintenon’s “Conversation sur la droiture” attests to the disappearance of such repertoire. See *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 136-137: “Par exemple, Mademoiselle, on ne veut point que nous chantions des chansons profanes, et l’on prend toutes sortes de précautions pour qu’il n’en entre point dans la maison, ni par les livres, ni par les écrits.” In ms. n.a.f. 10678, *Mémoire de ce qui s’observe dans la royale maison de Saint-Louis*, fol 10 which dates from the eighteenth century, the post-reform vocal repertoire at Saint-Cyr is described in the following terms: “Leur musique est italienne ou Française, elles ne chantent que des motets, ou des pièces, dont les paroles sont pieuses et n’ont n’y chansons n’y cantates, n’y opéra profanes.” Therefore, if Roche’s claim is valid, he must be referring to the pre-reform Saint-Cyr, prior to the systematic purging of books deemed inappropriate by the abbé des Marais, which leads me to propose that Maintenon’s “Conversation sur la droiture,” was composed after the reform.

were banished from Saint-Cyr by this time.<sup>31</sup> In the face of such evidence, a few questions come to mind. What was it in Scudéry's *Conversations* that inspired Maintenon to incorporate them into her curriculum and to compose her own *Conversations*, only to eliminate them thereafter? How were Scudéry's texts used in this curriculum? What was the relation between these texts and Maintenon's own *Conversations* as they were used at Saint-Cyr? The following section offers some answers to these questions.

### ***Maintenon Reads Scudéry***

Maintenon originally invited her students to read Scudéry's *Conversations* because they presented the most refined aspects of salon culture. I believe that Maintenon proposed her *Conversations* as theatrical adaptations of Scudéry's narratives, thus as a means of actively assimilating these texts. Maintenon's *Conversations* do not represent Scudéry's adult characters, but rather adapt them to the character of her students. Vis-à-vis Scudéry's *Conversations*, Maintenon's *Conversations* exemplify the process of imitation through which the art of conversation is learned: the imitator preserves his distinct identity and avoids affectation by maintaining a critical distance from the imitated. By imitating, and not simply copying, Scudéry's *Conversations*, Maintenon forges a conversational style true to what she perceives as her students' nature, while teaching them to maintain a critical distance from the ideals of salon culture.

---

<sup>31</sup> The memoirs of Mme de Caylus, Maintenon's niece, and of the duc de Noailles, who had married another niece of Maintenon, confirm the use of Scudéry's *Conversations* prior to 1691 and not thereafter. See Jacquemin, *Livres et jeunes filles nobles à Saint-Cyr (1686-1793)*, 70.



Literary critics who have compared the *Conversations* of Maintenon and Scudéry have generally insisted on their unlikeness. Maintenon's are brief and dramatic in form, whereas Scudéry's are lengthy and narrative. Goldsmith suggests that between 1686 and 1691, "Scudéry's conversation collections were used as textbooks in Mme de Maintenon's experimental school for young noblewomen."<sup>32</sup> She also maintains that Maintenon's *Conversations* are "short, spare, and tightly organized around the topic" in a "tit-for-tat exchange of prudent remarks," while Scudéry's represent "ideal sociability" characterized by the "pleasurable and free circulation of words." From her textual comparison, Goldsmith concludes that if Maintenon initially incorporated Scudéry's *Conversations* into her curriculum, she grew to "mistrust the free play of conversation" that they exemplified, "seen as a waste of words and a threat to one's good reputation,"<sup>33</sup> hence their removal during the reform of the school. The historian Jacques Prévot attributes the disappearance of Scudéry's *Conversations* at Saint-Cyr not to their prolix quality, but to their "sujets [...] mondains, plus païens qu'évangéliques."<sup>34</sup> A statement in Maintenon's letter of September 20, 1691 addressed to one of her teachers documents her sudden aversion for what may be Scudéry's *Conversations*: "Ne leur apprenez point les conversations que j'avois demandées; laissez tomber toutes ces choses-là sans en rien dire, et que tout soit conduit par la piété."<sup>35</sup> However, a closer look at the *Conversations* by Scudéry and Maintenon reveals that their subject matter and discursive style are not as divergent as one might suppose. Both authors use the conversational form, entailing a

---

<sup>32</sup> Goldsmith, "Excess and Euphoria in Madeleine de Scudéry's *Conversations*," 66.

<sup>33</sup> Goldsmith, "Excess and Euphoria in Madeleine de Scudéry's *Conversations*," 68.

<sup>34</sup> Prévot, *La première institutrice de France*, 219.

<sup>35</sup> Maintenon, *Lettres historiques et édifiantes*, 1: 175-176.

plurality of voices and opinions, to explore a wide variety of subjects, from courage, reason, softness, and friendship to coquetry, gossip, idleness, and lying. The *Conversations* of Scudéry and Maintenon distinguish themselves from other seventeenth-century fictional representations of salons (e.g., by Sorel, de Pure, Molière) through their participants' desire to precisely define these concepts collectively.<sup>36</sup> Maintenon cites her "Conversation du mensonge" (date of composition unknown) as an exemplary demonstration of contrasting views being debated correctly in a spirit of politeness. This dialogue can therefore be considered representative of Maintenon's objectives when writing her *Conversations*. Her text, albeit considerably shorter, borrows heavily from Scudéry's own "Conversation du mensonge," which appeared in the first volume of *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets* published in 1684, two years prior to the inauguration of Saint-Cyr.<sup>37</sup>

Prévot makes an intriguing claim regarding the use of Scudéry's *Conversations*: according to his hypothesis, not only were they read and discussed by the students, as Goldsmith presumes, but acted out as well.<sup>38</sup> Like most of her *Conversations*, Scudéry's "Conversation du mensonge" spans some fifty pages in the original publication, and though its general form is narrative, it is mostly occupied by dialogue.<sup>39</sup> Such a work

---

<sup>36</sup> In Maintenon's "Conversation sur l'Éducation à Saint-Cyr," the character Mlle 3 complains of Maintenon's tendency in her *Conversations* to "leur faire faire des définitions." See Maintenon, *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 182.

<sup>37</sup> Scudéry, *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets*, 1: 393-455.

<sup>38</sup> To support this claim, Prévot presents the following citation: 'Au début on y joua les *Conversations sur divers sujets* de Mlle de Scudéry.' Regrettably again, this citation is not presented with its source, which might be primary or secondary. See Prévot, *La première institutrice de France*, 219.

<sup>39</sup> Alain Niderst notes in his biography *Madeleine de Scudéry, Paul Pellisson et leur monde* (1976), 514-516, that the first publication of Scudéry's *Conversations*, the two volumes of 1680, contain dialogues extracted and slightly retouched from her lengthy novels *Le Grand Cyrus* and *Clélie*. Scudéry's preference in the late seventeenth century for the conversational form over that of the novel is thought to reflect her

might have been performed through voiced reading in a salon setting. Long texts demanded stamina on the part of the reader and patience on the part of the listeners. Even if lengthy voiced readings did take place during recreation at Saint-Cyr, Maintenon wanted her students to experience and assimilate Scudéry's texts differently, through the exercise of enactment. Scudéry's "Conversation du mensonge" would have proven too difficult for memorization by any acting troupe, let alone a group of young students. Is it not possible then that Maintenon's "Conversation du mensonge" served as a dramatic adaptation gleaning the essential elements from Scudéry's original text? In that case, the "tight" organization of dialogue would reflect the dictates of a different performance medium, rather than a negative view of salon sociability or the author's stylistic dryness, as Goldsmith suggests. Did Maintenon really author the dramatized "Conversation du mensonge," or was her role rather one of an arranger, thus validating Prévot's claim that the students enacted Scudéry's *Conversations*, that is, through the form provided by Maintenon? Or did the numerous structural and discursive borrowings serve as a framework within which Maintenon reassessed and reworked Scudéry's "Conversation du mensonge," clearly distinguishing between the two conversations and explaining why Scudéry's did not survive the reform at Saint-Cyr?

In her "Conversation du mensonge," Scudéry presents two dialogues devoted to the topic of lying. Her text opens with a salon group in then-contemporary France visiting a friend's estate and taking pleasure in its numerous optical illusions, both in the

---

desire to please a more "impatient" readership interested in "l'analyse psychologique et la réflexion morale," rather than in complex plot structures and lengthy character portraits. However, as Niderst notes, her *Conversations* published in the 1680's and 1690's are not extracted and condensed from her earlier novels. In these texts, Scudéry "innove et ose, avec une belle fécondité [...] inventer, et créer encore," developing the conversation into a literary art as important as its oral precedent.

garden (games of perspective, life-like statues) and inside the residence (collections of life-like insects and animals, impressively realistic paintings, even a mock “collation,” or table spread of refreshments, followed by a real one). The group discusses these artistic illusions, deeming them acceptable forms of “lying” because they procure aesthetic pleasure when the truth is revealed and the quality of the illusion can be appreciated. The host then offers them a text of which they undertake a voiced reading. This text, fully presented in Scudéry’s “Conversation du mensonge,” constitutes another conversation within a group of *honnêtes gens* in ancient Greece.<sup>40</sup> In this second conversation, the characters debate at length the act of lying and its moral implications.

Maintenon’s “Conversation du mensonge”<sup>41</sup> does not feature the reading of a conversation within a conversation. She thus adheres to the unities of action, time, and place specifically required of the dramatic medium: a single conversation of several minutes is represented within a single group in a single setting. Maintenon’s conversation directly imports the dialectical format and content of the conversation read aloud in Scudéry’s text. At the beginning of Scudéry’s and Maintenon’s dialogues, the characters complain about an absent person who incessantly lies. In Scudéry’s conversation, the character Herminius then declares himself to be an enemy of all types of lying. In Maintenon’s version, Mlle 5 makes the same claim. In both conversations, the other interlocutors endeavor to mitigate this radical position by citing situations in which lying may be considered acceptable (e.g., in the name of civility, generosity, or amusement). In spite of these counterexamples, Scudéry’s Herminius and Maintenon’s

---

<sup>40</sup> The *mise en abyme* of one salon conversation in another through the practice of voiced reading occurs frequently in Scudéry’s *Conversations*.

<sup>41</sup> Maintenon, *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 58-68.

Mlle 5 hold fast to their common position. They are then seconded by certain members of their respective conversation circles, while the others evoke the possibilities of lying to save a friend's life or reputation, of keeping silent instead of speaking an unpleasant or ungracious truth, of exaggerating one's compliments, and of adding embellishments in a storytelling. Both Herminius and Mlle 5 begrudgingly approve of the first two cases, though such lying must be done regretfully and as rarely as possible. They find no fault with the last two because compliments and storytelling are generally understood to exaggerate the truth. At the end of this polite debate in Scudéry's text, the lady Plotine, who has questioned Herminius most persistently, surrenders to his position. Maintenon's text similarly ends with Mlle 7 abandoning her adversarial role vis-à-vis Mlle 5 and drawing a conclusion reiterating the immorality of lying. In Scudéry's epilogue, the original group that had undertaken the voiced reading continues a little while to chat about lying in writing (satires, love songs, and histories), in the games of love ("les vrays Amans" vs. "les Amans coquets"), and in military action.

**"Conversation du mensonge"**

<i>Scudéry</i>	<i>Maintenon</i>
p. 405: Anacreon says of the absent liar: "Pour une heure ou deux, on s'en divertit, mais j'avoue qu'à continuer sa conversation est insupportable."	Mlle 3 says of the absent liar: "J'aimerais assez à m'en divertir pour une heure."
p. 407: Anacreon: "Pour les mensonges plaisants, je demande grace pour eux."	Mlle 3: "Je demande grâce pour ceux qui sont plaisants."
pp. 407-408: Clidamire: "je consens qu'on mente pour s'excuser."	Mlle 3: "Au moins on peut mentir pour s'excuser?"
p. 408: Berelise: "Tout de bon, il y a plus de menteurs que je ne croyois?"	Mlle 2: "Tout ce que nous disons fait voir qu'il y a plus de menteurs qu'on ne pense."
p. 419: Merigene: "je conclus qu'on pourroit mentir pour sauver la vie ou la liberté à un Amy; mais qu'il ne faut jamais mentir pour ses propres interests."	Mlle 1: "Si j'étais tentée de mentir, ce ne serait jamais pour mon intérêt, et je me ferais un double plaisir de dire une vérité qui serait contre moi."
pp. 416-417: Plotine: "Encore faut-il que je m'instruise pleinement sur cet article-là, & que je fasse des questions à la Compagnie qui m'enseignent & me corrigent pour l'avenir [...] du moins permettez-vous ces mensonges officieux qui vont à l'utilité de nos Amis, ou qui servent à cacher leurs deffauts."	Mlle 3: "Encore faut-il que je m'instruise une fois pour toutes sur cet article, et que je fasse quelques questions: ne croyez-vous pas qu'il soit permis, par exemple, d'user de ces mensonges officieux qui vont à louer nos amis où à cacher leurs défauts?"

p. 417: Valerie asks, “Vous me laisseriez donc mourir pour un mensonge?,” to which Herminius responds, “[...] j’avoüe que j’aurois beaucoup de dépit de vous sauver la vie par une voye si peu glorieuse [...]”	Mlle 6 asks: “Quoi! vous ne mentiriez pas pour sauver la vie à une de vos amies?” to which Mlle 5 responds, “Je regarderais au moins comme un malheur d’avoir à me servir de ce moyen.”
p. 420: Herminius: “En effet c’est souvent faire un mensonge que de taire une vérité qu’il seroit à propos de dire”	Mlle 5: “c’est un mensonge; et même très criminel, de taire une vérité quand il est à propos de la dire.”
p. 426: Herminius: “comme ils sont connus pour tels, & qu’il n’y a personne qui fasse nul fondement solide sur des compliments, ce sont des mensonges sans malignité [...] & je m’accommode à l’usage sans scrupule.”	Mlle 5: “Ils sont tellement connus pour tels, et d’un si grand usage dans le monde, qu’ils ne trompent personne; ainsi je n’en fais pas grand scrupule.”
p. 426: Anacreon asks Herminius, “[...] quand je voudray faire un conte agreable vous me permettez d’ajouter quelque chose à l’Histoire [...],” to which Herminius responds, “Ah pour cela, je croy qu’il peut estre permis, car comme on ne croit non plus les contes que les compliments, je laisse la liberté à vostre imagination [...]”	Mlle 4 asks Mlle 5: “Puisque vous nous permettez ceux-là, vous nous accorderez bien d’ajouter quelque chose à un conte agreable,” to which Mlle 5 responds, “Comme on ne croit pas plus les contes que les compliments, je laisse là-dessus une entière liberté à votre imagination.”

Maintenon’s conversation is teeming with direct or approximate quotations from the conversation read aloud in Scudéry’s text, as the table above illustrates. In view of these blatant parallelisms occupying a quarter of the lines in Maintenon’s text, it is difficult to sustain that her conversation was intended to be at odds with that of Scudéry. Maintenon lifted the principal lines, slightly retouched if at all, in order to present the essence of Scudéry’s lengthy dialogue. In light of this adaptation, it is obvious that Maintenon approved of Scudéry’s literary style to the point of imposing it on her students as a model of verbal expression, assimilated involuntarily through dramatic practice.

*Docere et placere* necessarily differed between a leisurely (voiced) reading of Scudéry’s lengthy prose and the student enactment of Maintenon’s short script during recreation time. Maintenon’s style strikes Goldsmith as dry and didactic; her judgment seems to be based on the numerous omissions between Scudéry’s and Maintenon’s texts. However, style is not defined by content alone, particularly when the medium changes from narrative to dramatic. Given the admiration and delight of visitors witnessing these

performances, as we will see later, it is unlikely that Maintenon's *Conversations* were enacted by the students in a sober, monotonous, and dogmatic fashion. What appears as a "tit-for-tat" exchange on paper may actually have been performed in a spritely, light-hearted manner ensuring, on the contrary, that both the performers and the audience remained interested and engaged in the text.

Admittedly, Scudéry's interlocutors elaborate their ideas more than Maintenon's. Anacréon's complete enunciation regarding an absent friend who perpetually lies (see the first entry in the table above) reads as follows: "Pour une heure ou deux, reprit Anacreon, on s'en divertit, mais j'avoüe qu'à continuer sa conversation est insupportable; car quelque soin qu'on y prenne, & quelque resolution qu'on ait faite de ne le croire point on y est toujourns attrapé, & il dit les choses d'un air si franc, & qui paroist si ingenu qu'il peut tromper toute sa vie." Surely, Anacréon's discourse is not too lengthy for memorization by a student at Saint-Cyr; more lengthy enunciations can be found elsewhere in Maintenon's *Conversations*.<sup>42</sup> In her "Conversation du mensonge," however, Mlle 3 utters only one sentence, "J'aimerais assez à m'en divertir pour une heure," before Mlle 2 objects with "Je ne pourrais jamais me divertir d'une personne que je ne pourrais pas croire." Mlle 3's confession is too brief to express the vague ambivalence gradually surfacing in Anacréon's. Maintenon does not simply shorten Scudéry's text; she simplifies the ideas and emotions expressed by Scudéry's salonnières. Each student represents one idea associated with one sentiment; the confrontation

---

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, the following passage in her "Conversation sur l'ajustement": "Ce sont nos inclinations qui nous perdent: quand nous ne nous y opposons pas, elles nous font faire un chemin dont nous ne nous serions jamais douté; on se pare d'abord sans aucun autre dessein que de se satisfaire soi-même: on trouve quelqu'un qui nous loüe, on y prend plaisir, on s'ajuste pour plaire à celui qui nous a le plus loüée: il le voit, & connoît notre foible, il en abuse; on engage son cœur & on se perd de réputation."

between these distinct ideas and sentiments is what constitutes the dramatic “action” in Maintenon’s *Conversations*.<sup>43</sup> Scudéry’s *Conversations* were enjoyed for their leisurely exploration of vague sentiments and subtle character traits. Perhaps Maintenon feared that such features would lessen the dramatic impact of her text and the dynamic play of conversation among her energetic, quick-thinking students.<sup>44</sup>

Still, not all of the omissions between Scudéry’s and Maintenon’s “Conversation du mensonge” were due to the conversion of a leisurely narrative into a lively enactment. Maintenon’s text is not simply an abridged dramatization of Scudéry’s. Goldsmith correctly identifies Maintenon’s mistrust in the “free play of conversation” among her students. Maintenon used her *Conversations* to correct the tendency among Saint-Cyr’s students, particularly during recreation, to chatter and “quarrel” without rhyme or reason. They were dramatic representations of her students according to her idea of how they should be (*la vraisemblance*), rather than of how they really were (*la vérité*). Still, the students’ image as chatterboxes seems to have been difficult to dispel, even through

---

<sup>43</sup> During the seventeenth century, dramatic action is not only defined by physical actions and events taking place on stage, but by the verbal gestures and conflicts occurring between the characters. Molière promotes the theatrical representation of this verbal action in *La Critique de l’École des femmes* (vi), when the pedant Lysidas erroneously claims: “Peut-on souffrir une pièce qui pêche contre le nom propre des pièces de théâtre? Car enfin, le nom de poème dramatique vient d’un mot grec qui signifie agir, pour montrer que la nature de ce poème consiste dans l’action; et dans cette comédie-ci, il ne se passe point d’actions, et tout consiste en des récits [...]” Lysidas, a staunch advocate of “les règles de l’art,” undoubtedly bases his statement on the following passage from *La pratique du théâtre* by d’Aubignac: “A considerer la Tragédie dans sa nature & à la rigueur, selon le genre de Poësie sous lequel elle est constituée, on peut dire qu’elle est tellement attachée aux actions qu’il ne semble pas que les discours soient de ses appartenances.” However, this passage is soon after contradicted in d’Aubignac’s text: “Aussi est-il vray que les Discours qui s’y font doivent estre comme des Actions de ceux qu’on y fait paroistre; car là *Parler*, c’est *Agir*, ce qu’on dit pour lors n’estant pas des Récits inventez par le Poëte pour faire monster de son Eloquence.” See François Hédelin, abbé d’Aubignac, *La pratique du théâtre* (Paris: Antoine de Sommaville, 1657), 370.

<sup>44</sup> Maintenon’s lively *Conversations* for enactment by young ladies are thus the exception that confirms the rule of adult salon conversation. See Liti, *Le monde des salons*, 280: “N’imaginons pas la conversation de salon comme un enchaînement de vives reparties pleines d’à-propos. De telles conversations, qui ressembleraient à des dialogues de théâtre, auraient été épuisantes.”



Maintenon's parsimonious writing style, as a manuscript of the "Conversation sur le silence," written by the students in imitation of Maintenon's *Conversations*, reveals:

*Conversation sur le silence*, composée par les demoiselles de la classe verte sur ce qu'un scavant homme leur dit après les avoir entendue [*sic.*] qu'elles parloient admirablement bien sur tout, mais qu'il ne scavoit si elles scavoient se taire.

Mlle Ière: Ne remarquâtes-vous point mesdemoiselles il y a quelque jour, que faisant une de nos conversations devant un homme de grand merite, il demande si nous n'en avions point sur le silence?

[...] Mlle 3ème: Il auroit eû tort, car nous en parlions que parce qu'on le vouloit.<sup>45</sup>

In order to curb her students' talking, Maintenon did not squarely order them to keep quiet (even though this measure was taken at Saint-Cyr at the beginning of the reform). She allowed them to talk and, as Mlle 3 reveals, even impelled them to talk, while providing them with models to guide them in their talking. Maintenon's *Conversations* entailed a pedagogical approach in which the students were not left to themselves, whether in silence<sup>46</sup> or in chatter. By literally putting words into her students' mouths in these *Conversations*, Maintenon hoped to render as second nature for them efficient and effective communication, without the mannerisms of the *bel esprit*, in preparation for their eventual entry into "le monde."

The characters in Scudéry's "Conversation du mensonge" exercise little restraint when they speak. Near the beginning of the conversation, the older gentleman Herminius speaks continuously, asserting that lies lead to the corruption of one's nature, that truth

<sup>45</sup> Ms. n.a.f. 10677, "Histoire de la Maison roiale de S. Cyr par Madame d'Eperville," fol. 77.

<sup>46</sup> Jacquemin reveals that this philosophy of accompaniment characterized the pedagogical approach at Saint-Cyr. See *Livres et jeunes filles nobles à Saint-Cyr (1686-1793)*, 140-141: "[...] plus encore que la seule lecture vigilante, c'est la mémorisation qui est de règle. Cette pratique, fort répandue dans l'enseignement du temps, était modulée par une volonté maintes fois répétée de bien expliquer aux élèves le contenu des ouvrages à apprendre [...] à chaque temps de lecture individuelle et silencieuse des Demoiselles, succédait une demi-heure consacrée au 'rapport' à haute voix de cette lecture [...] souci d'efficacité de l'enseignement [...] peur d'une mauvaise compréhension de l'écrit, susceptible de corrompre jusqu'au meilleur des ouvrages. [...] Mme de Maintenon subordonne toujours la mémoire à la compréhension, l'ornement de l'esprit à la formation de la raison."

alone is the basis of a functional society, that there is nothing worse than an untruthful servant, friend, or lover, and that lying is therefore no less than criminal.<sup>47</sup> Through this lengthy moralization occupying five pages in Scudéry's text, Herminius secures his authority in the conversation circle. One may argue that the character's age and gender justifies the combination of decisiveness and long-windedness, a combination that Maintenon's equivalent of Herminius, Mlle 5, cannot demonstrate without stepping out of character.

Outside of the walls of Saint-Cyr, according to Maintenon's "Conversation sur la bonne contenance," a young woman in a salon gathering is supposed to exercise discretion above all:

Qu'elle se taise, qu'elle écoute, qu'elle réponde quand on la questionne, qu'elle dise son avis avec timidité, si on le lui demande, qu'elle n'ait jamais un ton décisif, & que dans ce qui lui paroît le plus clair elle dise: Il me semble que cela est ainsi, je croirois cela, mon opinion seroit celle-là, etc. [...] On peut disputer pour s'instruire, & avec un air incertain qui plaît, au lieu que la décision révolte.<sup>48</sup>

She cannot appear to lecture or express an opinion with too much confidence, even if she is certain of herself, for her lack of experience and seniority, in relation to her interlocutors, obliges her to play a deferential role in this social setting. On the other hand, Maintenon affirms that a woman with more years, wisdom, and experience can acceptably appear "plus ferme [...] entame la conversation, [...] fait des questions, [...] a une opinion, [...] la soutient, [...] décide quelquefois."<sup>49</sup> Scudéry's *Conversations* offer multiple examples of ladies who express themselves decisively and with authority.

Numerous seventeenth-century theorists of sociability maintain, however, that women

---

<sup>47</sup> Scudéry, *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets*, 1: 409-414.

<sup>48</sup> Maintenon, *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 311.

<sup>49</sup> Maintenon, *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 310.

especially must demonstrate finesse and discretion in conversation. The decried quality of preciosity among salonnières connotes, among other unfavorable qualities, verbosity and pretentiousness. Du Bosc thus offers this advice in *L'Honneste femme*: “je me contenterois de souhaiter aux Dames les trois avantages que Socrate désiroit en ses Disciples, la discretion, le silence, & la modestie,”<sup>50</sup> Saint François de Sales promotes similar values for Philothée<sup>51</sup> in his *Introduction à la vie dévote*: “En toutes conversations, la naïveté [understood as naturalness], simplicité, douceur et modestie sont toujours préférées.” The word “modestie” with which feminine virtue is frequently associated during this period denotes not only chastity, propriety, and the suppression of vanity, but more generally moderation<sup>52</sup> and self-control. Neither Du Bosc nor de Sales condemn women to silence. When Du Bosc calls for silence, he refers to occasional pauses in order to prevent a woman’s speech from sounding like babble: “Le silence donne, je ne sçay quelles graces à la parole mesme, comme les ombres aux couleurs dans la peinture [...] les intervalles [...] font paroître comme les poses dans la Musique, ce

---

<sup>50</sup> Du Bosc, *L'Honneste Femme*, 31.

<sup>51</sup> In the “Preface” to the *Introduction à la vie dévote*, François de Sales explains that his work originally entailed a series of letters addressed to “une âme” in particular, that of his cousin Madame de Charmoisy. When these writings were assembled and committed to publication as the *Introduction*, François de Sales modified the addressee in order to encompass both a male and female readership: “J’adresse mes paroles à Philothée, parce que, voulant réduire à l’utilité commune de plusieurs âmes ce que j’avais premièrement écrit pour une seule, je l’appelle du nom commun à toutes celles qui veulent être dévotes; car *Philothée* veut dire amatrice ou amoureuse de Dieu.” François de Sales adjusted several passages in his work in order to accommodate the new, androgynous addressee. Still, other passages bear the traces of the original soul in mind, notably the passage concerning conversations. The female gender of the addressee is strongly implied not only by the word “modestie,” but also “douceur.” In Scudéry’s “Conversation de la douceur” in *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets*, 1:231-274, the admittedly vague quality of “douceur” is customarily attributed to women, whereas “appeller un homme doucereux est une injure.” (See p. 246.)

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, François de Sales, *Introduction à la vie dévote*, 201: “Il faut pour l’ordinaire qu’une joie modérée prédomine en notre conversation [...] et afin que votre *modestie* paraisse, gardez-vous des insolences lesquelles sans doute sont toujours répréhensibles: faire tomber l’un, noircir l’autre, piquer le tiers, faire du mal à un fol, ce sont des risées et joies sottes et insolentes.” Emphasis mine.

qu'il y a de plus beau & de plus agreable."<sup>53</sup> Discretion is even more crucial for young people in salon society. In his "Discours des agréments," Méré bemoans the awkwardness of young salonniers:

La grande beauté commence à paroître dan la grande jeunesse, mais il arrive peu que le parfait Agrément s'y fasse remarquer; et je voy que les jeunes gens ont d'ordinaire mauvaise grace. Considérez ces jeunes Comediens, quoy que beaux et bien faits, à peine les peut-on souffrir. Et prenez garde aussi que les plus belles femmes ne sont pas si dangereuses quand elles sont si jeunes, que dans un âge plus avancé [...] Mais d'où vient que les jeunes gens n'ont point de grace? C'est qu'un jeune homme ne sçait que fort peu de chose, et qu'il est encore Ecolier en tout: s'il parle il ne sçait ce qu'il dit, et s'il agit il ne sçait par où s'y prendre, de sorte qu'il ne faut pas s'estonner s'il a peu de grace.<sup>54</sup>

It is significant that Méré cites as counterexamples to "le parfait Agrément" the young salonnier and the young stage actor; no matter how good looking they might be, they cannot affect that "je ne sçay quoy" that only age and experience bring to their respective performance arts. Grenaille is more liberal than Méré and his contemporaries; he maintains in *L'honnête fille* that when "la conversation des Filles" combines the physical charms of their person and the grace of their voice with the eloquence of carefully chosen words and the "force" of their "raisonnement," these girls "font tout l'agrément des plus belles compagnies."<sup>55</sup> However, Grenaille admits that his position is iconoclastic: "On me dira [...] que cette science ne peut pas estre necessaire aux filles, veu que le silence leur est beaucoup plus seant que la beauté du discours."<sup>56</sup> Thus Maintenon's attitude regarding the verbal comportment of young people, and the discretion of young ladies in particular, seems to have reflected a general consensus.

---

<sup>53</sup> Du Bosc, *L'Honneste Femme*, 33.

<sup>54</sup> Méré, "Discours des Agréments," 2:36.

<sup>55</sup> Grenaille, *L'honnête fille*, 347-353.

<sup>56</sup> Grenaille, *L'honnête fille*, 347. Grenaille also suggests that young women learn Greek and Latin, ancient tongues that erudite men traditionally study, in order to better master their mother tongue. Furthermore, they should be well versed in "les matieres hautes" including history.

None of Maintenon's speakers appear overconfident or long-winded. On the other hand, they are not reduced to mere diffidence. Therein lies the complexity of Maintenon's *Conversations*. Her student characters are hindered neither by the presence of adults nor by the ungainliness of their own youth. Maintenon forges a discursive and behavioral style that brings to light the charms of their ingenuousness, polishing their speech without forcing them into affectation. Her *Conversations* are modeled after salon conversations among adults, those of Scudéry, thus enabling her students to express themselves with civility, reason, elegance, and even assertion. However, these enhanced expressive capacities do not obscure their social identity as young ladies; Maintenon does not allow her students to affect the decisiveness and verbal freedom of adult salonniers. As was discussed in my third chapter, in order to acquire the art of conversation, Ortigue de Vaumorière and Méré recommend the frequentation and imitation of individuals who have mastered this art. Both authors insist that one must not betray one's "nature" when imitating others. The novice should not simply mimic experienced salonniers, which would only lead to awkwardness and affectation, but rather adapt their manner of speaking to her personal style considered appropriate for her age, social station, and immediate circumstances, thus her "character" as much as her "nature."

Other elements of Scudéry's text disappear in Maintenon's because they are undoubtedly considered inappropriate for young speakers and listeners. First of all, references in Scudéry's text to the gallantry of men are absent in Maintenon's, namely, the act of lying in order to please one's mistress<sup>57</sup> and the difference between "les Vrays

---

<sup>57</sup> Scudéry, *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets*, 1:408.

Amans” and “les Amans coquets.”<sup>58</sup> Secondly, the verbal act of disparagement occurring repeatedly in Scudéry’s conversation is severely reduced in Maintenon’s. While Scudéry’s conversation opens with several characters generating a lengthy, unflattering verbal portrait of a man known as a habitual liar,<sup>59</sup> the absent liar in Maintenon’s text is evoked through a mere three sentences. Much later in Scudéry’s dialogue, four of the gentlemen disparage at length the ridiculousness of those who lie when they brag about themselves,<sup>60</sup> a passage that is entirely excluded from Maintenon’s conversation. In Scudéry’s text, Berelise spends three pages poking fun at Clidamire for engaging in hypocritical civilities when faced with an unwelcome visitor.<sup>61</sup> Such mockery, if pushed too far, might have been interpreted at Saint-Cyr as license to engage in malicious gossip or bullying. Raillery in Maintenon’s dialogue, on the other hand, is limited to a few sarcastic remarks:

Mlle 5: Je crois qu’il faut louer nos amis, et même ceux qui ne le sont pas, de tout ce qu’ils ont de bon, et se taire sur ce qu’ils ont de mauvais.

Mlle 7: Si on les accuse, ne les défendez-vous pas

Mlle 5: Je les excuserai le plus que je pourrai, et comme la charité m’oblige à bien juger de leurs actions, ou de leurs motifs, je les excuserai sans que ce soit une mensonge.

Mlle 7: Mais s’il s’agissait d’une faute visible qui ne se peut excuser.

Mlle 5: J’éviterais d’en parler.

Mlle 3: Il ne faut pas attendre un grand secours de Mademoiselle, et il ne faut pas que ses amies fassent de grandes fautes.

Mlle 2: Il est vrai que, si on la croit, elle nous jettera dans un grand silence.

Mlle 4: Je ne sais même si elle ne nous accuserait pas de mentir en ne disant rien?<sup>62</sup>

Mlles 2, 3, and 4 playfully address Mlle 5 in the third person at the end of this passage, teasingly interpreting as a sign of disloyalty her silent discretion when an absent friend is

---

<sup>58</sup> Scudéry, *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets*, 1:445.

<sup>59</sup> Scudéry, *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets*, 1:404-406.

<sup>60</sup> Scudéry, *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets*, 1:428-433.

<sup>61</sup> Scudéry, *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets*, 1:422-424.

<sup>62</sup> Maintenon, *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 65.

disparaged. Within Scudéry's fictional conversation circle of good friends, raillery can be pushed far without offense taken. Maintenon, on the other hand, instructs her students to err on the side of caution when they tease someone. At the same time, far from suppressing or even mitigating raillery in her dialogue, Maintenon demonstrates in this passage that the qualities of brevity and indirection, as opposed to Scudéry's verbosity and directness, actually serve to sharpen raillery while preventing it from degenerating into maliciousness.

At one point, Mlle 4 indulges in a playful discourse revealing that Maintenon's sense of discipline does not preclude her equally important sense of humor, fun, and irony in the midst of conversation:

Mlle 5: Pour une fausseté, non, je n'y consentirai jamais, et le plus que je pourrais faire, ce serait de tolérer quelques exagérations.

Mlle 4: Ah! Pour des exagérations, je vous défie de les empêcher, ou il faut changer toutes nos coutumes; au lieu de dire: *Il y a long-temps que je ne vous ai vue*, il faudrait dire: *Il y a un jour et demi que je ne vous ai vue*; au lieu de dire: *Je suis ravie de vous voir*, il faudrait dire: *Je suis médiocrement aise de vous voir*; au lieu de dire: *Je suis sensible à vos malheurs*, on pourrait quelquefois dire: *Je me sens assez indifférente à vos malheurs*; ainsi de presque tous les discours de la vie.

Mlle 2: Vous voulez railler, mademoiselle; mais ne croyez-vous pas que, si on ne peut pas ôter tout-à-fait ces exagérations, l'on ferait bien d'approcher toujours le plus près possible de la vérité?

Mlle 4: J'y consentirais volontiers pourvu que cela ne mît point une contrainte et une fadeur dans la conversation, qui en ôteraient un grand agrément.<sup>63</sup>

This raillery is not pointed at an individual. Rather, it is a game of language in which a succession of polite formulae are reformulated to expose their covert, less polite meanings. In Scudéry's "Conversation du mensonge," the passage which most closely approaches this one is Amilcar's raillery regarding the *airs passionnés*: "ostez des Chansons passionnées les soupirs, les larmes & les, hélas! Je meurs, de tous ces Amants qui ne meurent point, & qui ne veulent pas seulement estre malades, elles ne toucheront

---

<sup>63</sup> Maintenon, *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 62-63.

point du tout.”<sup>64</sup> Maintenon actually expands Scudéry’s joke by reinforcing the use of antithesis, alternating each formula with its underlying, incongruous truth to create an amusing seesaw effect. Similar to Mlle 4’s joke, that of Amilcar denounces hackneyed expressions used in song to represent passionate love, exposing the unromantic truth behind them. The rhetorical use of enumeration, direct citation (“hélas! Je meurs”), and antithesis has the same humorous effect in Amilcar’s and Mlle 4’s jokes. Maintenon changes the subject of the joke from love songs, which have no place in a proper conversation among young ladies, to the topic of polite conversation itself.

Mlle 4 demonstrates through this raillery her awareness of and detachment from the subtle hypocrisies of conversation. She is making fun of conversation in a dramatic representation that is supposed to teach students how to converse properly. At the same time, Mlle 4 recognizes that conversation could never be enjoyable without these hypocrisies, just as Amilcar recognizes that the *airs passionnés* would cease to be touching without verbal lyricism. Their respective discourses thus paradoxically deride and validate the need for exaggeration. Still, Mlle 4’s joke is more powerful because it sheds an ironic light on all of the polite expressions said in the course of that conversation (e.g., “Je suis ravie de vous trouver, Mesdemoiselles”; “Cela est admirable”; “Vous êtes trop bien instruite, mademoiselle, pour ignorer que...”). Thus Maintenon strikes a delicate balance through her reformulation of Amilcar’s raillery: on the one hand, she provides examples of polite expressions for the students’ edification, and on the other hand, she teaches them to regard these expressions with a critical eye.

---

<sup>64</sup> Scudéry, *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets*, 1:448.



Maintenon thus used Scudéry's text to forge a conversational style and a standard of social propriety deemed ideal for young ladies. She undoubtedly hoped that her students would maintain this ideal during their own conversations at Saint-Cyr, away from the watchful eye of authority. Unlike young women outside the walls of Saint-Cyr who usually contented themselves with the silent observation and imitation of adults, Maintenon's *Conversations* provided her students with the unique opportunity to practice the art of conversation without having to affect adult behavior. Maintenon proposed her "Conversation du mensonge" as an entertaining, edifying, and interactive activity to be enacted in a lively, playful, and not dry or didactic manner. Furthermore, Maintenon's text constituted her institutional reading of Scudéry's text. This reading was free to directly import and appropriate those elements of Scudéry's "Conversation du mensonge" deemed valuable and fit for imitation, to reject other elements deemed inappropriate, and to reformulate still others according to her idea of how her characters – and the actresses behind them – should be. It was through this versatile treatment of Scudéry's text that Maintenon's dialogue offered the following lessons: that speaking well does not require pretentious wittiness; that moral conviction does not necessitate long-windedness; that concision can render mockery pointed and inoffensive at the same time; that a good conversation does not preclude the speakers' ironic detachment from conversation.

Given the many correspondences between the original "Conversation du mensonge" and Maintenon's dramatic adaptation for young ladies, what then explains the disappearance of Scudéry's *Conversations* from Saint-Cyr in 1691, at the onset of the school's official reform? Why would Maintenon wait until that very moment to attribute her students' vanity and unruly chattiness to their readings of Scudéry's *Conversations*?

I do not concur with Goldsmith and Prévot who associate the suppression of Scudéry's *Conversations* with Maintenon's supposedly sudden disapproval of these texts. I believe that this suppression was ordained by another authority: the Church. When Maintenon placed Saint-Cyr under the tutelage of the abbé des Marais, bishop of Chartres, she agreed to follow his judgment regarding the education and upbringing of her students.<sup>65</sup> In a sermon pronounced at Saint-Cyr in 1692, for example, he condemned the festivities around Epiphany as "ces réjouissances profanes qui sont un reste des superstitions païennes." Following this speech, the students and teachers knew that all such festivities would be banned at Saint-Cyr, "n'ignorant pas la déférence que Mme de Maintenon avait pour les sentiments de M. l'Évêque de Chartres."<sup>66</sup> Thus when the abbé des Marais and Maintenon undertook in 1691 the systematic purging of all inappropriate books and musical scores from Saint-Cyr, it was undoubtedly he who judged Scudéry's *Conversations* as works "qui ne leur apprendroient [aux demoiselles] rien d'utile ou auroient quelque chose de suspect."<sup>67</sup> Even though she had drawn inspiration from

---

<sup>65</sup> See Piéjus, *Le théâtre des demoiselles*, 559: "Des causes politiques s'ajoutèrent aux nécessités de reprise en main [...] L'amélioration des relations entre Louis XIV et le Saint-Siège, suivie de l'union de la mense abbatiale de Saint-Denis à la maison de Saint-Louis, permettait, financièrement et stratégiquement, de créer un nouveau couvent politiquement proche de la Cour [...] il n'était guère envisageable que le pape reconnût une institution dans laquelle on ne prononçait pas de vœux solennels. De plus, l'institution étant très en vue, sa position 'phare' de modèle pour les couvents et de révélateur de la conduite morale de la Cour, ne pouvait être établie sur le modèle des constitutions les plus récentes. Enfin, les revenus importants de la fondation, grâce à la mense abbatiale de Saint-Denis en particulier, seyaient assez mal à une institution sans vœux solennels. [...] L'étroitesse des liens entre Versailles et Saint-Cyr rendus patents par la régularisation, expliquent aussi la reprise en main sévère de l'institution, reflet de la moralité et des intentions du roi et de son épouse."

<sup>66</sup> See Prévot, *La première institutrice de France*, 108-109.

<sup>67</sup> From *Lettres patentes / portant / fondation de la maison / Royale et Communauté des / Dames de St Louis establies / A St Cyr*, F-Pn, F<sup>19</sup> 6345, cited in Piéjus, *Le théâtre des demoiselles*, 562. See also du Pérou, Rés. F. 629-630: 1:112-113: "Madame de Maintenon [...] consulta Mr. l'Évêque de Chartres et Mrs Tiberge et Brisacier sur le remède qu'il falloit apporter, et les précautions qu'il y avoit à prendre; ils furent d'avis de soustraire aux Dlls tout ce qui pouvoit exciter leur curiosité, de banir absolument toute lecture qui ne pouvoit servir qu'à leur élever l'Esprit, et de s'en tenir aux instructions les plus simples et les plus familières. Pour en venir à l'exécution de ce projet, on fit dans les classes une recherche de tous les

Scudéry's *Conversations* to compose her own (which, again, were not yet published at this time), it is highly unlikely that Maintenon would have questioned her superior's decision to banish these texts from Saint-Cyr. Their disappearance is therefore more revelatory of Maintenon's deference toward the abbé des Marais than of her independent judgment of them.

Thus Scudéry's *Conversations* were axed while Maintenon's continued to be composed and performed after 1691. One must not presume, however, that Maintenon's student characters become perfectly obedient and pious in her post-reform *Conversations*, in accordance with the new, austere environment at Saint-Cyr. In her "Conversation sur la droiture," in which the elimination of secular music scores is mentioned,<sup>68</sup> Mlle 4 openly expresses her defiance toward the school's policy banishing elements of salon culture ("Je ne puis pas m'empêcher de sçavoir ce que j'ai appris dans le monde") and reinforcing religious rectitude ("Je serois ravie qu'il [mon Confesseur] ignorât ma faute").<sup>69</sup> As we will see shortly, Maintenon gave voice to her students' feelings of dissent in many of her *Conversations*. What is remarkable is that this tendency continued even after 1691! Through her dramatic exercises, she exercised for her students their freedom of speech despite the severity of her new religious directors. Alerted against the dangers of the printed word, they sought to banish salon culture from Saint-Cyr by eliminating, with Maintenon's respectful approval, Scudéry's published *Conversations*.

---

manuscrits qui ne traitoient pas de choses pieuses, on les enleva, et rien ne put échapper à cette visite générale qui fut faite avec la plus grande exactitude."

<sup>68</sup> See note 30 in the present chapter.

<sup>69</sup> Maintenon, *Les Loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 137, 140.

They seem to have been less attentive to the students' more defiant spoken words, inconspicuously dictated by Maintenon herself.

Then again, perhaps Maintenon had privately disapproved of her students' manner of reading Scudéry's *Conversations* over time and took advantage of her directors' sweeping initiative in 1691 to eliminate these texts from Saint-Cyr. By attributing their disappearance to an outside authority, after using them to compose her *Conversations*, Maintenon could thus avoid appearing inconsistent in front of her teachers and students. Perhaps her students were overly mimetic in their approach to Scudéry's *Conversations*: they distorted their own nature in an attempt to imitate Scudéry's characters, thus falling into affectation in their private conversations. Maintenon makes the following confession to one of her teachers: "Dieu sait que j'ai voulu établir la vertu à Saint-Cyr, mais j'ai bâti sur le sable. N'ayant point vu ce qui seul peut faire un fondement solide, j'ai voulu que les filles eussent de l'esprit, qu'on élevât leur cœur, qu'on formât leur raison [...] nous avons formé leur raison, et fait des discoureuses, présomptueuses, curieuses, hardies."<sup>70</sup> The "sand" in question refers to the education she had provided, less solid than "une éducation simple et chrétienne." The sand may also be a metaphor for the students themselves, too impressionable and malleable to read Scudéry's *Conversations* without becoming affected in their attempt to imitate adults.

If Maintenon continued after 1691 to compose *Conversations* for her students to enact, it was because she was too pragmatic to try to suppress her students' natural propensity to become what they read. Rather, she took advantage of this mimetic

---

<sup>70</sup> Maintenon, *Extraits de ses lettres*, 13.

tendency and of the school's relative seclusion to offer her own textual representations of salon culture for identification and imitation by her students. She instituted a unique form of salon society within the walls of Saint-Cyr, the principle actors of which were young ladies who expressed themselves neither as typical youths nor as eloquent adult salonniers. Her *Conversations* did not represent idealized conversations among adults as in Scudéry's *Conversations*, but they still presented an ideal of conversation, one in which verbal expression among young speakers was unhindered, yet within the confines of "reason." Maintenon's *Conversations* were the only "readings" of Scudéry's *Conversations* permitted after the reform of the school. Nevertheless, her more rigorous sense of authority does not seem to have stifled her playful sense of irony.

***But Were They Performances?***

Salon conversation was commonly recognized in the seventeenth century as a performance art that hides itself. Each interlocutor presented an image, deceptive to varying degrees, of naturalness and total spontaneity in front of the others, resulting in simultaneous individual performances feeding off of each other and a collective performance that was not collectively avowed. Unlike real salon conversations, the student enactment of Maintenon's *Conversations* was a collectively avowed performance. The enunciations of each demoiselle were recognized by her interlocutors to be a recitation from memory, and this recitation could not stray from the original script without disrupting the entire performance. The students did not express themselves, but rather Maintenon's representations of them. Such conditions may seem to have precluded the impression of naturalness essential to the art of conversation. However, Maintenon's *Conversations* were just that: exercises in affecting naturalness. These

student recitations were sometimes mistaken for spontaneous conversations (or improvised performances of conversations) by onlookers invited to watch and admire how well spoken they appeared to be. Moreover, the identification between Maintenon's nameless characters and the student actresses was so strong that the actresses liked to credit themselves for the verbal elegance of Maintenon's script, imagining that the words put in their mouths naturally emanated from them. This unique dramatic performance practice provided training for their entry into salon society which likewise blurred the distinction between acting and naturalness, character and self.

As was mentioned earlier, the performance context of Maintenon's *Conversations* at Saint-Cyr is revealed in part by Racine in his preface to *Esther*. Racine visited the school on multiple occasions, particularly during the rehearsals of his biblical tragedy commissioned for the students. According to Racine, the students normally make "good use" of their recreation time through a variety of performance activities:

[...] en leur montrant les choses essentielles, et nécessaires, on ne neglige pas de leur apprendre celles qui peuvent servir à leur polir l'esprit, et à leur former le jugement. On a imaginé pour cela plusieurs moyens, qui sans les detourner de leur travail, et de leurs exercices ordinaires, les instruisent en les divertissant. On leur met, pour ainsi dire, à profit leurs heures de récréations. On leur fait faire entre elles sur leurs principaux devoirs<sup>71</sup> des conversations ingénieuses, qu'on leur a composées expres, ou qu'elles composent sur le champ. On les fait parler sur les histoires qu'on leur a lues, ou sur les importantes vertuz qu'on leur a enseignées. On leur fait reciter par cœur, et déclamer les plus beaux endroits des meilleurs Poètes. Et cela leur sert sur tout à les défaire de quantité de mauvaises prononciations qu'elles pourroient avoir apportées de leurs Provinces. On a soin aussi de faire apprendre à chanter à celles qui ont de la voix, et on ne leur laisse pas perdre un talent qui les peut amuser innocemment, et qu'elles peuvent employer un jour à chanter les louanges de Dieu.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> understood not as "homework," but as moral, marital, familial, and social duties when they reach adulthood

<sup>72</sup> Jean Racine, *Esther* (Paris: D. Thierry, 1689), n.p.

Whereas certain historians believe that such exercises served to prepare the students for the definitive performance, that of Racine's play,<sup>73</sup> Racine himself situates his play within an ongoing culture of performance at Saint-Cyr. During recreation, the students can demonstrate the excellence of their pronunciation, test their memory and understanding of texts, and display the beauty of their singing voices, not unlike the performance practices of the salon.

As the omnipresent, authoritative personal pronoun "on" in this passage implies, the students' recreation-time performances seem to take place under constant supervision. In her "Description de Saint-Cyr," Scudéry does not mention the performance of conversations, yet she confirms the ever-watchful presence of the teachers during the students' recreation:

On leur donne à Saint Cyr une honneste liberté, mais toujours à la veüe de leurs Maistresses qu'elles aiment beaucoup [...] rien n'est plus utile à de jeunes filles que d'estre en la présence de celles qui sont chargées de leur conduite [...] Les deux grandes classes, aux heures de la récréation [...] font quelquefois entre elles des concerts, des recits en prose & en vers de quelques ouvrages choisis qui exercent leur mémoire sans leur rien apprendre que de bon & d'honneste pour les mœurs; mais toujours à la veüe de celles qui les conduisent, comme je l'ay déjà dit.<sup>74</sup>

In this text, Saint-Cyr is being described by the fictional character Bérénice during a salon conversation after she has supposedly visited the school. One may assume that Scudéry expresses through Bérénice's voice her own impressions of Saint-Cyr after having visited it.

The descriptions of recreation offered by Racine and Scudéry differ significantly from the testimony of the headmistress Catherine Travers du Pérou in her memoirs.

---

<sup>73</sup> Taphanel, *Le Théâtre de Saint-Cyr*, 36: "Pendant que Racine créait pour les jeunes pensionnaires de Saint-Cyr un de ses plus purs chefs-d'œuvre, celles-ci se préparaient par d'excellents exercices à la déclamation et au jeu du théâtre."

<sup>74</sup> Scudéry, *Nouvelles conversations de morale*, 1:263-265.

According to du Pérou, to the outside eye the students appear to be more autonomous. It is in the chapter devoted to the years 1687-1688, the only chapter in which she refers to Maintenon's *Conversations*, that du Pérou explains how the teachers are instructed by Maintenon to hide when visitors enter the school upon Maintenon's invitation. This measure is taken in order to protect the teachers, who have taken religious vows, from the temptations of society:

Saint Cyr étoit nouveau, et déjà à la mode, tous les grands s'empressoient d'y venir, Mme de Maintenon les amenoit souvent, et leur faisoit voir elle-même la maison dans le détail, les Dames seules étoient alors invisibles, Mme de Maintenon vouloit qu'elles se tinsent cachées et qu'elles ne fissent aucune connoissance. Elle à toujours désiré une grande séparation du monde, et nous exhortoit à ne pas craindre de paroître un peu sauvages, c'est, disoit elle, le seul moyen de vous conserver, si vous vous montrés au monde bientôt vous prendrés son esprit, et celui de votre vocation s'affoiblira, vous donerés dans une dissipation qui ruinera votre piété et vous écartera de vos devoirs. Elle ne le craignoit pas moins pour les Dllles qui étoient encore plus susceptibles de la vanité, mais come c'étoit elles que l'on venoit voir il falloit bien se prêter à la curiosité du tems, au moins se faisoit elle un point de conscience de ne pas quitter les personnes qu'elles amenoit, et d'entretenir par sa présence la gravité et la modestie qu'elles devoient avoir dans ces circonstances.<sup>75</sup>

If du Pérou's account holds sway, no visitor to Saint-Cyr would see the students accompanied by their teachers during recreation time. The omnipresent "on" in Racine's description seems to correspond with Maintenon herself who "se faisoit [...] un point de conscience de ne pas quitter les personnes qu'elles amenoit, et d'entretenir par sa présence la gravité et la modestie qu'elles devoient avoir dans ces circonstances." As du Pérou explains, Maintenon hosts these visits, explaining the functioning of the school, presenting the students to the guests, showing the school grounds, etc., while the teachers remain out of view. Scudéry's description of activities supervised by teachers corresponds most likely to what Maintenon has told her during her visit, the normal protocol at Saint-Cyr when visitors are absent and teachers come out of hiding. In the

---

<sup>75</sup> Du Pérou, Rés. F 629-630, 1:67.



context of the interaction between visitors and students, du Pérou specifies the performance practice of Maintenon's *Conversations*:

Non seulement Mme de Maintenon donoit aux Dlls des Leçons pour bien écrire, mais elle vouloit encore leur apprendre à parler juste, à propos, et d'un tour aisé et naturel dans la conversation, pour cela elle fit plusieurs petits entretiens sur differents sujets qui en divertissant par leur agrément donnoient de solides instructions pour apprendre à juger sainement des choses, et à se bien conduire en toutes circonstances, ces entretiens qui sont imprimés sous le titre les Loisirs de Mme de Maintenon, sont très utiles pour les jeunes personnes, et sont à présent come alors l'objet de l'amusement des personnes du monde qui entrent dans la maison. Le Roy Louis XIV les agréoit fort, et y trouvoit une agréable solidité qui lui faisoit prendre plaisir à les entendre.<sup>76</sup>

Maintenon's *Conversations* serve not only as a pedagogical tool contributing to the edification, discipline, and pleasure of her students, but also as entertainment for "des personnes du monde qui entrent dans la maison." Contrary to Scudéry's impressions, in the apparent absence of the teachers, Maintenon does not necessarily appear to control her students with a watchful, authoritative eye when visitors are around. More likely, she demonstrates "gravité" and "modestie" in order to keep her guests in line, to dissuade them from distracting her students from their activities. In such conditions, the guests may believe they are watching spontaneous conversations that typically take place among the students. Hence, the absence of conversation performances in Scudéry's description; Bérénice simply notes that during recreation, "elles parlent avec gayeté, & se content les unes aux autres ce qui les peut divertir."<sup>77</sup> Though a figure of authority as both director of the school and author of the texts being performed, Maintenon is paradoxically obliged to efface her authorship, to "hide" much like her teachers, in order for the performance to take effect, for the students' conversations to appear spontaneous as all conversations are supposed to appear.

---

<sup>76</sup> Du Pérou, Rés. F 629-630, 1:70.

<sup>77</sup> Scudéry, *Nouvelles conversations de morale*, 1:264.

The students' enactment of the *Conversations* during recreation before members of polite society was thus part of a larger, carefully constructed, invisible *mise en scène*, in which Maintenon played the role of the discreet hostess, the teachers made their presence felt more strongly through their absence, and the entire school projected an image of itself in stark contrast with typical convent education. The performances of Maintenon's *Conversations* projected a flattering image of the students in front of the visitors: they presented themselves as well spoken, reasonable, and sociable young ladies who had succeeded in eliminating their provincial accents and who demonstrated a natural capacity for the art of conversation. Apparently unsupervised, spontaneous, and voluntary, the students' demonstrations gave the impression that they were capable of using their "honneste liberté" to speak "juste, à propos, et d'un tour aisé et naturel dans la conversation." This impression was sometimes reinforced by the content of the dialogues, which drew attention to the element of serendipity in these secretly orchestrated gatherings.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, if the students were capable of speaking so well without the direct prompting of their teachers, it was presumably due to the excellent education provided by these teachers.

Other spectators interpreted the students' conversations as concerted performances of improvisation. Unlike Scudéry who perceives the students' conversations as spontaneous and natural, Racine seems more *au fait*, probably by virtue of his frequent interactions with the students in preparation for *Esther*. He remarks in his preface that these "conversations ingénieuses" are performances "qu'on leur a composées

---

<sup>78</sup> Maintenon, *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 9: (Sur la Raison) "Si j'osois me mettre de la partie, je dirois que le hazard assemble aujourd'hui une très-bonne Compagnie"; 196: (Sur les inconvénients du Mariage) "Je suis bien aise de me trouver avec vous, Mesdemoiselles, & quand je vous aurois choisies, je n'aurois pas mieux fait que ce que le hazard vient de faire."

expres, ou qu'elles composent sur le champ." Racine's use of the verb "composer" is critical. He does not suggest that the students are conversing on the spot, but that they are composing on the spot; they are engaged not simply in a spontaneous conversation, but in an improvised performance of a conversation. Another visitor of Saint-Cyr similarly interprets one of the students' conversations as a concerted, improvised performance of conversation. He is evoked at the beginning of the "Conversation sur le silence": "*Conversation sur le silence*, composée par les demoiselles de la classe verte sur ce qu'un scavant homme leur dit après les avoir entendue [*sic.*] qu'elles parloient admirablement bien sur tout, mais qu'il ne scavoit si elles scavoient se taire."<sup>79</sup> Note that the visitor does not address the students in the middle of their conversation, but respectfully waits for them to finish their performance before he jokingly asks them if they also know how to keep quiet. Would he have spoken in this offhand manner if he knew that Maintenon, who accompanies his visit, has composed the dialogue taking place between the students? He is under the impression not only that the students' conversation is improvised, but that this improvisation is completely voluntary, as one of the demoiselles later remarks in the "Conversation sur le silence": "Il auroit eû tort, car nous ne parlions que parce qu'on le vouloit." The visitor judges their conversation to be spontaneous, yet consciously performed; he believes that the students are endeavoring to speak "admirably well" in a dramatic situation, rather than expressing themselves in a real social situation. As a character in Maintenon's "Conversation sur l'Éducation à Saint-Cyr" explains: "Nous représentons, on nous écoute; nous disons des choses pleines

---

<sup>79</sup> Ms. n.a.f. 10677, "Histoire de la Maison roiale de S. Cyr par Madame d'Eperville," fol. 77.

d'esprit & de vérité."<sup>80</sup> "Nous représentons," she insists; as spontaneous as the students' conversation appears, the "scavant homme" realizes that they are performing for him. Maintenon's exemplary gravity and modesty undoubtedly dissuade him from directly joining in the students' conversation, but his silence also suggests a desire not to break through the "third wall," so to speak, not to interrupt what he understands to be a *mise en scène* of salon culture.

Both the "scavant homme" and Racine thus fall victim to at least one dramatic illusion created by Maintenon and her students: that these performances are (sometimes) improvised by the students. The opening of the "Conversation sur le silence" suggests that if the students perform their own dialogues, they are composed and memorized in advance.<sup>81</sup> The students thus succeed in representing the "tour aisé et naturel dans la conversation," for their spectators assume that their words come spontaneously to them, rather than being dictated by Maintenon and recited thereafter. The discrepancy between Scudéry's belief that these conversations are spontaneous and artless, Racine's understanding that they are often *mises en scène* of Maintenon's texts, and the "scavant homme"'s impression that they are dramatic improvisations illuminates the ambiguity underlying the very art of conversation, a performance which denies itself in the name of naturalness.

This aesthetic of naturalness distinguished the performances of Maintenon's *Conversations* from the students' staged productions at Saint-Cyr, most famously the

---

<sup>80</sup> Maintenon, *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 180.

<sup>81</sup> Maintenon eventually prohibited the students from composing their own conversations, afraid that the exercise would go to their heads. See citation in Prévot, *La première institutrice de France*, 220: "Arrêtez tout court les *Conversations* des Demoiselles [...] ce serait une perte de temps et de papier qui les exciterait sur l'esprit et rendrait orgueilleuses celles qui réussiraient le mieux."

1689 production of Racine's biblical tragedy *Esther* with vocal music by Jean-Baptiste Moreau, *maître de musique* of Louis XIV.<sup>82</sup> Like all plays enacted at Saint-Cyr, whether secular (by Corneille, Racine, Boyer, and Testu) or religious (by Saint-Cyr's own Mme de Brinon), *Esther* was intended for performance strictly before the gated community of students and teachers. However, the school production quickly developed into a performance sensation before the court of Louis XIV. Saint-Cyr's premiere of *Esther* was thought to surpass the most grandiose performances at Jesuit *collèges*.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, Maintenon later admitted having been motivated by "le désir d'exceller" as the court public's interest in her students' performance grew. She wanted her young amateurs to surpass even the most accomplished professionals, to offer an ideal spectacle in which the perfection of the students' acting and diction (after intense coaching by Racine and Boileau) was complemented by the sumptuousness of their costumes<sup>84</sup> and the beauty of their well trained voices. When the students stepped onto the stage, they transformed into accomplished artists and courtly ladies, as Maintenon's niece the comtesse de Caylus notes after a private performance of *Andromaque*: "soit que les actrices en fussent mieux choisies, ou qu'elles commençassent à prendre des airs de la cour, dont elle ne laissoient pas de voir de temps en temps ce qu'il y avoit de meilleur, cette pièce ne fut que trop bien

---

<sup>82</sup> For a detailed account of this staged production at Saint-Cyr, please refer to Anne Piéjus's impressive study, *Le Théâtre des Demoiselles. Tragédie et musique à Saint-Cyr à la fin du grand siècle*.

<sup>83</sup> Du Pérou, Rés. F. 629-630, 1:109 "Il y eut dans ces circonstances plusieurs jésuites fameux par leur profond savoir qui demandèrent de voir cette pièce, entre lesquels étoient le P. Bourdalouë, le Père de la Ruë et autres [...] ils furent très contents du spectacle et dirent que leurs ecoliers n'aprochoient en rien du talent des Dllles et qu'ils seroient doresnavant honteux de les exposer aux yeux du public après ce qu'on avoit vu ici."

<sup>84</sup> Du Pérou, Rés. F. 629-630, 1:93: "[Maintenon] avoit fait faire des habits Persans pour toutes les Dllles qui devoient paroître sur le Théâtre, ils étoient très brillans, ornés des Perles et des Diamans du Temple, qui avoient servis autrefois dans les balets et autres festes. Ces diamans avec les autres ajustemens coutèrent à Me de Maintenon au moins quatorze mille Livres."

représentée, au gré de Madame de Maintenon.”<sup>85</sup> In her desire to make her students excel before the court audience, Maintenon unwittingly made immodest spectacles out of her students, brazenly displaying their charms before gentleman viewers, some of whom responded with marriage proposals: “il sera tres dangereuse de faire voir a des hommes des filles bien faites et qui ajoutent des agrémens a leurs personnes en faisant bien ce qu’elles representent.”<sup>86</sup> Even though the production of *Esther* was not open to the general public like a theater in Paris, Maintenon feared she had disgraced her honorable institution by parading her students and their artistic talent in front of male courtiers. In her memoirs, du Pérou attempts to salvage the image of the students and the institution by attributing the excellence of their stage performance precisely to their modesty, thus merging Castiglione’s concept of *la sprezzatura* (shunning affectation) with the dictates of feminine virtue: “Tout le monde convint que l’Opéra et la Comédie n’aprochoient pas de ce spectacle. On voyoit ici sur le Théâtre de jeunes Dllles bien faites dont les Rôles rendus avec modestie n’inspiroient que piété et vertu, et qui éloignées des affectations du Théâtre profane donoient aux spectateurs l’idée de la plus pure innocence.”<sup>87</sup> Unlike *Esther*, the modest performances of Maintenon’s *Conversations* demonstrated the students’ verbal skills without endangering their image. The *Conversations* turned the students into dramatic performers without likening them to professional actors. They prepared the students for their entry into salon society by adapting the art of conversation to their age group, rather than inciting them to adopt “des airs de la cour.” The audience

---

<sup>85</sup> Marthe-Marguerite Le Valois de Villette, comtesse de Caylus, *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame de Caylus* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1889), 141.

<sup>86</sup> Ms. Fr. 11676: *Ecris de Madame de Maintenon: lettres et avis aux religieuses de Saint-Louis sur les devoirs de leur état et sur le gouvernement des classes*, 632.

<sup>87</sup> Du Pérou, Rés. F 629-630, 1:95.

was comprised of a few distinguished persons closely accompanied and observed by Maintenon herself. And whereas the spectacle of *Esther* was intended to dazzle the audience accustomed to the sensationalism and pathos of opera and grand theater, the success of these performances lay in the fact that they were hardly recognized as recitations.

This ambiguity was reinforced by the fact that the students performing the *Conversations* interpreted characters who themselves were supposed to be students at Saint-Cyr. It should be noted that literary reception in the seventeenth century favored the identification between fictional characters and real contemporaries. The reader or spectator was often invited to identify the real “clefs” hiding behind the apparent fiction, which was presumed to be allegorical. Only once the characters and their actions were deciphered in this manner did the text deliver its true meaning. In Maintenon’s *Conversations*, did the demoiselle characters represent individuals, perhaps the ones performing them, or student “types” at Saint-Cyr? The only extant original manuscript of the *Conversations* which I have located, contained in ms. n.a.f. 10677 (“Histoire de la Maison royale de S. Cyr par Madame d’Eperville, eleve de Madame de Maintenon”), presents each speaker by a number. Thus the speakers in a dialogue involving four characters appear as “1,” “2,” “3,” and “4.” In the course of the dialogues, the characters simply address each other as “Mademoiselle.” All eighteenth- and nineteenth- century editions of Maintenon’s *Conversations*, on the contrary, assign names to these characters, chosen from the school’s archived roster of students. From one conversation to another, the same names are used to represent the speakers (Mlle Hortense, Mlle Constance, Mlle Rosalie, etc.). These editors probably assigned names in order to facilitate the reading of

these *Conversations* and to avoid confusion between characters. At Saint-Cyr, however, where the texts were acted out, each speaker was in the flesh and did not run the risk of being confused with another. Maintenon refused to name names and blatantly identify any of her speakers with specific students. As was mentioned earlier, she claimed that her *Conversations* were designed to teach her students through practice how to reason effectively and civilly together, regardless of the role they played in a given discussion, according to the expressive capacities she deemed appropriate for their age group. Still, the distribution of roles among the students remains a mystery. Could any student play any role or did Maintenon reserve certain roles for certain students based on a correlation between their real character and her dramatic characterization?

Who was instructed, for example, to play the role of Mlle 3 in the “Conversation sur l’Éducation à Saint-Cyr”? She is a moody young lady who complains about catechism classes, the practice of the conversations themselves, and the “désir continuel de s’instruire qui regne ici,” insisting that “l’éducation de Saint-Cyr n’est pas exempte de critique.”<sup>88</sup> Her complaints meet strong objections from her interlocutors who extol the many qualities of Saint-Cyr. One must not assume that Mlle 3 is simply the black sheep inciting others to praise the school. Her opinions are well expressed and not necessarily without reason: catechism classes can be boring; it is natural for young people to prefer laughter and carefree amusement over “serious” instruction through philosophical conversations. When her friends mock her for preferring games over the enactment of Maintenon’s *Conversations*, she adeptly replies, “Ne vous en moquez point, Mesdemoiselles, je ne suis pas seule de mon goût; ces jeux-là sont en usage depuis qu’il

---

<sup>88</sup> Maintenon, *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 182, 183.



y a des enfans au monde, & on ne s'est point imaginé pour les réjouir de leur faire faire des définitions.”<sup>89</sup> Far from her image as a grim, matronly type, Maintenon is not without a sense of humor when she invites Mlle 3 to poke fun at her *Conversations*.<sup>90</sup> Maintenon's self-mockery did have its pedagogical utility, however. Perhaps she assigned this role to a particularly unruly student, or perhaps Mlle 3 embodied the feelings of dissent among multiple students at Saint-Cyr (“je ne suis pas seule de mon goût”). In either case, the creation of Mlle 3 demonstrated that Maintenon could read into her students' hearts and understand them. As Maintenon warns du Pérou, “Les filles en murmurent dans leur cœur d'autant plus amèrement qu'elles n'osent presque en parler.”<sup>91</sup> The enactment of her *Conversations* during recreation deterred the students from their own private conversations, conversations that she feared contained murmuring and other questionable exchanges. As she tells her teachers in 1702, “Quel avantage de contenir de jeunes personnes qu'il est si dangereux d'abandonner à elles-mêmes dans ces temps de récréation, où les conversations entre elles sont si pernicieuses!”<sup>92</sup> She specifies that the stage production of *Esther* serves not only to “remplir leur esprits de belles choses, leur donner de grandes idées de la religion, elever leurs cœurs aux sentimens de la vertu, orner et cultiver leur mémoire de choses dont elles ne seront point honteuses dans le monde, leur apprendre a prononcer,” but to “les retirer de la conversation entre

---

<sup>89</sup> Maintenon, *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 182.

<sup>90</sup> Similarly in the “Conversation sur l'ajustement,” the characters poke fun at the somber uniform they wear at Saint-Cyr. See Maintenon, *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 94: “Mademoiselle veut que nous portions toujours l'habit de Saint Cyr [...] Et qu'on nous montre au doigt par-tout par la singularité de cet habillement.”

<sup>91</sup> Maintenon, *Extraits de ses lettres*, Lettre à Mme du Pérou concernant la nourriture à Saint-Cyr.

<sup>92</sup> Maintenon, “Entretien avec les Dames, 28 juin 1702” in *Extraits de ses lettres*, 64.

elles, et amuser surtout les grandes qui depuis 15 ans jusqu'à vingt s'ennuyent un peu de la vie de St Cyr."<sup>93</sup> Even more than *Esther*, Maintenon's *Conversations* served to supplant her students' private conversations. Practiced and performed during recreation, they more closely imitated her students' conversational style. Maintenon paradoxically made her students speak in her presence as if they were not in her presence, offering an exemplary image of young ladies conversing both freely and correctly. Maintenon validated any feelings of dissent by giving them clear, intelligent, and proper expression... and through this means, she probably sought to assuage such feelings. Mlle 3's pointed words in the "Conversation sur l'Éducation à Saint-Cyr" cannot not be effaced by the objections of her more obedient interlocutors. This character's ability to correctly express and justify her dissatisfaction entailed a risk for Maintenon: either it served to clear the air, resulting in a stronger complicity between Maintenon and her students, or it only fanned the flames, feeding the desire to murmur against her and her institution.

Maintenon seems to have encouraged the students to identify with her verisimilar characters. However, the students' regard for these characters may have transcended simple identification and admiration, developing into a confusion between dramatic character, social character, and real student. If the rebellious, obstinate Mlle 3 represented the very student representing her or another student at Saint-Cyr, the quality of her verbal expression would have flattered the real student. Instead of feeling victimized by this identification between herself and the character, she might have taken pleasure and pride in a more eloquent version of herself. As Mlle 1 asks Mlle 3, "Mais

---

<sup>93</sup> Ms. Fr. 11676: *Ecris de Madame de Maintenon: lettres et avis aux religieuses de Saint-Louis*, 631.

présentement, Mademoiselle, ne vous divertissez-vous pas à soutenir une mauvaise cause avec tant d'esprit?"<sup>94</sup> Mlle 1's question seems to address the student actress representing 3, who through the dramatic medium suddenly finds herself transformed into a smart, well spoken young lady. As Mlle 6 remarks in the same conversation, through the miracle of dramatic representation, the students appear wise and mature without having to cede their youth: "Notre esprit s'éclaire sur des choses que nous n'aurions peut-être jamais connues, ou du moins il nous en auroit coûté une longue expérience."<sup>95</sup> They can pretend that their discourse is not scripted, that their conversation is not a performance, but rather a spontaneous expression, that they are not representing characters imposed by Maintenon, but simply being themselves. Mlle 2 in the same conversation says that she enjoys performing Maintenon's *Conversations* because "nous disons des choses pleines d'esprit & de vérité." These statements all appear to be metatheatrical, as if the actresses were taking a step back from the performance to comment upon the performance experience. The students at Saint-Cyr periodically performed biblical and secular tragedies containing far more "choses pleines d'esprit & de vérité." However, the representation of such characters was unlike the representation of oneself. It did not lead to such confusion between character and performer, between recitation and speech, a confusion implied in Mlle 2's expression "*nous disons.*" Maintenon's *Conversations* thus formalized the confusion taking place in real salon conversations between social character and "natural" self.

---

<sup>94</sup> Maintenon, *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 182.

<sup>95</sup> Maintenon, *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 180.

Through this confusion, Maintenon's *Conversations* provided her students with the opportunity to fantasize about their future as salonnières. Not only did the verbal eloquence of her characters incite the real students to emulate them, these characters enabled the real students to imagine themselves on the other side of Saint-Cyr's walls, in the heart of salon society. Even if it was not conceived as a convent school, Saint-Cyr kept its students in relative isolation. Their exposure to the outside world was controlled and exclusive: conversations with visiting family members in the school's "parloir" were closely supervised by teachers,<sup>96</sup> letters sent and received by the students were opened and read by Maintenon herself,<sup>97</sup> and the only authorized outings were visits with the co-founders Maintenon and Louis XIV in their *appartements* at Versailles. Marriage proposals showering the students after the performance run of *Esther* were a source of consternation for Maintenon who otherwise guarded her students jealously from members of the opposite sex. The student characters in the *Conversations* actually enjoy more liberties than the real students did. Several of these dialogues begin by a character recounting her experiences in a recent salon assembling both ladies and gentlemen in some fine residence.<sup>98</sup> By performing these characters, the students could imagine that

---

<sup>96</sup> See ms. n.a.f. 10678: *Mémoire de ce qui s'observe dans la royale maison de Saint-Louis*, Fol. 27, n.p.: "Les Dles ne vont jamais seules au parloir. La Maîtresse ou la Soumaîtresse les accompagne. On abrège tant qu'on peut les visites. Les Dames trouvent parmi elles une société si aimable qu'elle leur ôte le goût de celle du dehors." See also Maintenon, *L'Esprit de l'Institut des filles de Saint-Louis* (Paris: Jean Anisson, 1699), 41: "O qu'il est dangereux d'aller au Parloir se ragoûter sur des choses dont le mépris et l'oubli font toute vôtre paix et toute vôtre sureté dans la solitude! C'est chercher la tentation, et elle vous cherchera."

<sup>97</sup> Ms. n.a.f. 10678: *Mémoire de ce qui s'observe à la Royale Maison de Saint-Cyr*, Fol. 27, n.p.: "Les Dles écrivent tous les trois mois a leurs parents, elles ne reçoivent ni écrivent aucune lettre qui ne soit luë de la Maîtresse générale qui cache les leurs avec un cachet où sont les armes de la maison en losange."

<sup>98</sup> Maintenon, *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 104: (Sur l'indiscrétion) "Je sors d'un lieu où j'ai bien souffert: il y avoit un très-honnête homme qui étoit bossu; une jeune Dame a parlé lontems devant lui des avantages d'une belle taille"; 58: (Sur le mensonge) "Je suis ravie de vous trouver, Mesdemoiselles, pour vous faire mes plaintes de ce que Madame de... s'accommode du commerce d'une personne qui ne sçauoit

they had attended such salons, unaccompanied by their teachers. Thus Maintenon's *Conversations* not only adapted the elegant discursive style of the salon for young female speakers; they granted the students a fictional access to that culture. The fictional realm of dramatic enactment thus made available to these students a culture in which their youth, inexperience, and precarious economic and social situations, more than the walls of Saint-Cyr, prevented them from actively participating.

Perhaps any scholarly study of Maintenon's *Conversations*, simple dialogues for school girls hardly representative of the finest French classical literature, would be thought to "faire la fortune des petites choses et de les dérober à la vue à force de les faire paraître grandes."<sup>99</sup> But as Grenaille writes of female expression in conversation, "Icy la simplicité est la plus subtile science." The enactment of Maintenon's *Conversations* blurred the distinction between concerted performance and spontaneous conversation. It was hardly recognized as a recitation by visiting onlookers. Moreover, the students took pride in being able to speak with such elegance and wit, even if this ability was artificially conferred through a dramatic illusion. Maintenon thus used the conversational form to fashion an acting style qualified as "aisé et naturel" and adapted for young ladies. This style differed starkly from the more demonstrative, "immodest" art of professional

---

s'empêcher de mentir"; 159: (Sur la douceur) "Je sors d'un lieu où l'on a bien disputé; les unes soutenoient que Madame de... étoit douce & les autres prétendoient qu'elle ne l'étoit point du tout." See also Maintenon, *Conversations inédites de Mme la Mise de Maintenon* (Paris: J.-J. Blaise, 1828), 40: (Sur le danger des mauvaises compagnies) "– Je ne doute pas, mademoiselle, qu'elle ne voie beaucoup de gens; mais je doute qu'il y en ait de votre caractère, et je gagerois bien que vous n'y trouvâtes que des hommes et des coquettes. – Il est vrai qu'il y avoit beaucoup d'hommes. Je ne sais si les femmes étoient coquettes, mais je sais bien que la conversation fut vive, gaie et spirituelle, et que je ne me suis jamais mieux divertie."

<sup>99</sup> From Charles Cotin, "Discours sur les énigmes," in *Recueil des énigmes de ce temps* (Rouen: J. Cailloué, 1655).

actors whom the students emulated in *Esther*. Maintenon's *Conversations* may have been imposed pedagogical exercises, but these performances were not very different from real salon conversations in which each speaker developed a personal *mise en scène* behind an image of artless spontaneity. Affectation could be evaded in the students' performance because their represented characters were true to them, their frustrations, and fantasies. Through these *Conversations*, the salon thus rediscovered a polished yet unadulterated naturalness of youth. They also reveal that, contrary to conventional wisdom, Maintenon's sense of authority was not necessarily synonymous with austerity. Of course, it is naïve to presume that one can read into these students' hearts by studying the representations of them in Maintenon's *Conversations* and in the memoirs, letters, and descriptions left behind by Saint-Cyr's teachers and visitors. Then again, the seventeenth-century art of conversation played with the ambiguity between projected image and underlying nature.

## 5. The Superperformance of Molière's Salons

Molière was the first dramatic author and performer to represent salon culture extensively in his plays, through which he invented the comedy of manners genre. The representation of salon gatherings stands out from the rest of the dialogue in his plays in two important respects. First, these gatherings are formally initiated through a dramatic gesture appearing consistently throughout Molière's theater: in the presence of one's guests, one commands one's servants to arrange chairs for the purpose of polite conversation. This formality, comically distorted at times by the deviant behavior of the servants, the host, or the guests, is what marks the characters' transition into a "salon mode" of interaction. The importance of this social rite in Molière's theater is unique in seventeenth-century portrayals of salon culture; not only does it underscore the formality of salon interaction, it symbolizes a theatrical transition from traditional comedy to the comedy of polite manners. The second manner in which Molière distinguishes his salons from the rest of the dialogue in his plays is to engage his salonnières in social behavior that appears stylized, ceremonious, or comically affected. Instead of communicating, they seem to perform for each other, demonstrating their mastery of social codes and their cultural refinement, paying attention to their verbal, facial, and corporeal expression like an actor. Everything that Molière's salonnières say and do functions as a performance, from the manifestation of complaisance to acts of disparagement. Molière's salons are thus what I would call "superperformances": not only are his real actors performing fictional characters, but the fictional characters are socially performing

for each other as salonniers. The superperformance of Molière's salons thus constitutes a play within a play, more exactly, the play of sociability within a dramatic representation.

To my knowledge, no previous critical study of Molière's theater has called attention to the marked formality and superperformed quality of his salon scenes. Molière's emphasis on the artificiality of this social practice may seem to denounce the prevailing ideal of naturalness identified with the salon. Actually, Molière is revealing the salon to be a culture in which "natural" behavior is codified, conventionalized, and consciously performed. Moreover, he uses the superperformance of his salons to forge a theatrical acting style which he calls "natural," that is, based on the civil codes observed in real salons instead of the artistic codes of theatrical declamation.

Molière's salons may also serve to reveal a correlation between his stage performers and his refined spectators steeped in salon culture. As was discussed in the preceding chapters of my study, salonniers generally sought to avoid apparent affectation, immodesty, malice, and duplicity in their artistic and social performances. These qualities were condemned not only because they were offensive in themselves, but also because they were commonly attributed to stage performers whom salonniers generally disrespected. Molière's fictional salonniers occasionally demonstrate these qualities, and the fact that stage actors are behind this representation carries metatheatrical signification. Molière is not suggesting an identification between refined salonniers and lowly stage actors. When the fictional salonniers demonstrate such negative qualities, the real actors representing them seem to confirm the unflattering stereotypes suffered by their profession. The fictional salonniers' unflattering behavior implicates Molière's refined spectators as well. These spectators are the real "actors" of salon culture who



inspire the speech and actions of Molière's characters. His salons are not only theatrical representations of seventeenth-century salon society. They serve to reveal that the excesses of stage performance and the subtleties of social performance are not as dissimilar as most salonniers would like to imagine, but rather reflections of each other.

### *Sitting on the Stage*

The salons represented in numerous plays spanning Molière's career, from *Les Précieuses ridicules* to *Le Malade imaginaire*, are all ceremoniously initiated through the same "performative" verbal gesture. The schema is as follows: a host(ess) in the presence of one or more guests commands any servants at hand to assemble chairs for the purpose of conversation. The salonniers must therefore wait for the servants to properly arrange the chairs before they can sit down and interact with customary elegance, wit, and politeness. In rare instances, the verbal command is followed by swift action leading to salon interaction. More often than not, however, Molière calls attention to this formal procedure between master, servant, and guest by introducing humorous variants and complications. The guest may refuse to sit, for example, or the hostess may offend her guest by refusing to offer a chair. The servant's ability or willingness to follow the initial order varies from one salon situation to the next and can degenerate into physical humor. Not only does a servant's blunder with the chairs prolong and compromise the transition between "normal" interaction and salon interaction, it causes the host(ess) to demonstrate impatience and anger despite the desire to establish an atmosphere of ease and civility. The chair, providing the refined salonnier with necessary physical support much like the servant, can turn against its master and become a stumbling block for salon sociability. It is thus a theatrical prop serving as a instrument of comedy before serving as a

“commodité de la conversation.” Molière uses the chair to dramatize the tensions between the representation of the salon, commonly associated with verbal and physical elegance, and theatrical comedy, traditionally associated with physical humor.

The chairs in a salon are generically referred to as “des sièges” in Molière’s theater. The initial command varies little from from one play to another: “Allons des sièges [...] Laquais un siège” in *La Comtesse d’Escarbagnas* (I, ii and iv); “Allons donnez des sièges” in *L’Avare* (III,vii); “Des sièges pour tous” in *Le Misanthrope* (II, iv); “[...] des sièges à tout le monde” in *Le Malade imaginaire* (II, v). As seventeenth-century manuals on salon etiquette specify, the type of chair varies according to the degree of deference accorded to its occupant. The *fauteuil*, or armchair, offered to the marquis de Mascarille in *Les Précieuses ridicules* or to Climène in *La Critique de l’École des femmes* (hereafter referred to as “*La Critique*”) are signs of more respect than the “pliant,” or folding chair, offered to Monsieur Tibaudier in *La Comtesse d’Escarbagnas*. Monsieur Tibaudier is a humble poet courting his hostess; he willingly accepts his role as “serviteur” according to the laws of gallantry. Molière even proposes a humorous addition to this salon chair repertoire: a toilet seat. Argan in *Le Malade imaginaire* (II, v) holds a salon for his guests, his daughter, and her music teacher. His initial command is immediately obeyed: “Allons vite ma chaise, et des sièges à tout le monde.” Argan thus distinguishes between the other salonniers’ “sièges” and his own “chaise.” This *chaise* is a *chaise d’affaires*, or *chaise percée*, for which the actor Molière in the role of Argan becomes notorious. Though the *chaise percée* does not look very different from a *fauteuil* (see Figure 7 at the end of this section), it is customarily relegated to one’s private quarters. However, Argan transports it with him throughout his residence, like a

transitional object, following his frequent enemas. The *lazzo* of the enema, traditionally used in Italian *commedia dell'arte* and French farce, is thus replaced<sup>1</sup> by the less explicit and more suggestively humorous image of a man sitting on a toilet. The presence of this toilet in a salon gathering symbolizes Molière's departure from the traditional vulgarities of comic theater toward comedy based on the culture of civility, but not without a wink at the scatological humor of yore.

The function of the chair in Molière's theater is not limited to salon conversation. Notarial services rendered in one's residence, as in *Les Femmes savantes* (V, iii) and *Le Malade imaginaire* (I, vii), require the visitor to be offered a seat in order to offer professional advice, finalize documents, and supervise signatures. Servants are commanded to present a chair to a doctor before he undertakes an examination at someone's residence. Thus Sganarelle declares, "Allons, faites donner des sièges" in *L'Amour médecin* (II, ii) and "Allons, un siège" and in *Le Médecin malgré* (II, iv) as a manner of initiating a medical consultation. Molière briefly exploits the ambiguity between seated salonniers and seated doctors in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (I, viii). Pourceaugnac is escorted into a house which he believes belongs to Éraste, an "homme de qualité." Actually, the house belongs to an incompetent doctor who is ordered to examine and treat Pourceaugnac, regardless of any resistance the patient may show. Pourceaugnac mistakes the doctor for Éraste's "maître d'hôtel." This doctor and his colleagues, also mistaken for Éraste's "domestiques," sit around Pourceaugnac, examine his pulse when he offers to shake their hands, and spontaneously ask him about his

---

<sup>1</sup> This suppression of the onstage enema is comically played out in *Le Malade imaginaire* (III, iv) when Argan's brother Béralde prevents Monsieur Fleurant, "une seringue à la main," from interrupting a conversation between the brothers in order to execute his medically prescribed duty on Argan.

eating, sleeping, and bowel movements. Pourceaugnac exclaims in bewilderment, “Quelle diable de conversation est-ce là?” He mistakes these characters, once assumed to be servants, for a strange lot of salonniers speaking incessantly in medical jargon. After having suffered their “conversation” long enough, he realizes the truth and manages to escape their proposed treatment. It is in *Le Malade imaginaire* that Molière represents an actual salon in which the guests of honor are two longwinded doctors. MM. Diafoirus are only too content to verbally display their knowledge of medicine and Latin, whether or not their interlocutors lend a willing ear.

The chair is also used by Molière’s characters to take rest. Arnolphe in *L’École des femmes* (III, i) takes a chair in the shade in order to pronounce a “petit discours” instructing his young fiancée Agnès in the proper behavior of an obedient wife. This longwinded speech would tire Arnolphe in his old age had he delivered it standing. In *La Critique* (iii), Molière again plays on the ambiguity between the social function and the medical function of the chair. Climène enters Uranie’s residence out of breath and ready to faint. In the company of her cousin Élise, the hostess is alarmed by Climène’s physical state and immediately calls for an armchair, asking if she has the vapors and if her corset needs to be unlaced. Climène takes the chair, but refuses Uranie’s gesture to untie her corset: “Mon Dieu non. Ah!” The thought of such an act scandalizes the prudish Climène, a character who typifies preciosity in this play. She has arrived at Uranie’s residence in this dramatic state because she has just seen another play by Molière, *L’École des femmes*. Climène is eager to vent her consternation over what she perceives to be Molière’s disrespectful, licentious portrayal of women. Thus, she has come not really to take rest on Uranie’s armchair, but to gossip about theater. Though her presence

and conversation are secretly unwelcome here, Climène knows how to insinuate herself into Uranie's circle and to use her health to make Uranie pronounce the fatal command, "Un fauteuil promptement." Uranie thereby initiates against her will a salon conversation between Climène, Élise, and herself. If the use of the chair in Molière's theater is not limited to salon interaction, Molière instills this stage prop with a strong social connotation that can eclipse (in Pourceaugnac's imagination) or feign (through Climène's ruse) a medical function.

The formality of commanding one's servants to assemble chairs does not always follow the same discursive and comportmental scheme in Molière's salons. In *La Critique*, Uranie pronounces the command as soon as Climène bursts into her chamber. In *Le Malade imaginaire* (II, v), *L'Avare* (III, vii), *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (III, xvi), *Les Femmes savantes* (III, ii), and *Les Précieuses ridicules* (ix), however, the command follows a succession of compliments exchanged between the characters. In this latter play, Mascarille does not immediately sit down when presented with a "commodité de la conversation," as Magdelon terms it. He feigns apprehension, claiming that his heart is not safe in the presence of such fatally attractive ladies. Mascarille's refusal to sit is attributed to his "caractère enjoué," much to his hostess' pleasure, but playfulness cannot replace protocol. Cathos finally insists in a flirtatious manner, "Mais de grâce, Monsieur, ne soyez pas inexorable à ce fauteuil qui vous tend les bras il y a un quart d'heure; contentez un peu l'envie qu'il a de vous embrasser." In other situations, chairs may not be offered at all, indicating that the guests are not welcome in that residence. If Magdelon and Cathos generously offer an armchair to Mascarille in *Les Précieuses*

*ridicules*, they treat their two other suitors La Grange and Du Croisy with less courteousness, as La Grange bitterly recalls in the first scene:

A-t-on jamais vu, dites-moi, deux peccotes provinciales faire plus les renchéries que celles-là, et deux hommes traités avec plus de mépris que nous? À peine ont-elles pu se résoudre à nous faire donner des sièges. Je n'ai jamais vu tant parler à l'oreille qu'elles ont fait entre elles, tant bâiller, tant se frotter les yeux, et demander tant de fois: 'Quelle heure est-il?' Ont-elles répondu que oui et non à tout ce que nous avons pu leur dire? Et ne m'avouerez-vous pas enfin que, and nous aurions été les dernières personnes du monde, on ne pouvait nous faire pis qu'elles ont fait?

Note that at the head of La Grange's list of complaints is the ladies' reluctance to offer them chairs in the first place. The gesture of offering a chair translates the desire to spend time with one's guests and take pleasure in their conversation. By sitting down together, interlocutors show that they are at ease and worthy of each other's company, which is apparently not the case between the pretentious sisters and their unwelcome suitors.

In two plays, *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* and *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, the action of taking one's seat is comically deferred by "cérémonies" performed out of respect for one's interlocutor. In the first play, the comtesse d'Escarbagnas and her guest Julie are said to "[faire] des cérémonies pour s'asseoir." Exactly what do these "cérémonies" entail? Article XVI of "Les Loix de la galanterie" by Charles Sorel stipulates the following: "Pour régler votre civilité, vous ne manquerez jamais de saluer ceux qui vous saluent avec une humilité aussi grande que peut estre la leur" (the verb "saluer" denotes the lowering of one's hat).<sup>2</sup> In *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, two salonnières pronounce the following exchange as they perform their "cérémonies":

La Comtesse: Madame.  
Julie: Madame.

---

<sup>2</sup> Sorel, *Nouveau recueil*, 41. See also Courtin, *Nouveau traité de la civilité*, 18-19: "si un homme n'oste pas le chapeau pour resaluër, jusqu'aux personnes de la plus petite condition qui l'auront salué les premières, il passera pour un homme tres-incivil & mal élevé."

La Comtesse: Ah! Madame.  
 Julie: Ah! Madame.  
 La Comtesse: Mon Dieu! Madame.  
 Julie: Mon Dieu! Madame.  
 La Comtesse: Oh! Madame.  
 Julie: Oh! Madame.  
 La Comtesse: Eh! Madame.  
 Julie: Eh! Madame.  
 La Comtesse: Hé! allons donc, Madame.  
 Julie: Hé! allons donc, Madame.

Julie's exact repetition of the comtesse's "Madame"s suggests they are engaged in the action evoked by Sorel: they are paying respect to each other by curtsying.<sup>3</sup> Every time the comtesse curtseys, her guest endeavors to imitate her, curtsying "avec une humilité aussi grande." Julie's curtsy only incites the comtesse to reciprocate with another curtsy. Presumably, the comtesse modifies each curtsy in conjunction with her diverse exclamations ("Ah!" "Mon Dieu!" "Oh!" "Eh!" "Hé! allons donc"). In conjunction with the presentation of chairs, these "cérémonies" consecrate the beginning of the ladies' salon conversation proper, following an initial exchange between them. In *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, the character Molière<sup>4</sup> directs his actors who represent salonniers: "Bon. Après ces petites cérémonies muettes, chacun prendra place et parlera assis [...]" These "cérémonies muettes" are preceded by a brief verbal exchange between two salonnières: "Allons, Madame, prenez place, s'il vous plait." "Après vous, Madame." Each of the salonnières is performing a gesture entreating the other to take a seat first; an exchange of polite gestures thus ensues without either one of them sitting. Eventually, one of them

---

<sup>3</sup> See Courtin, *Nouveau traité de la civilité*, 27-28: "A l'égard des Dames [...] la reverence qu'elles font pour saluër [...] il est à remarquer que la reverence ne doit jamais estre, ni courte ni trop precipitée, mais basse & grave, où il y a lieu de la faire, ou au moins en s'inclinant un peu du corps, quand on ne fait que passer."

<sup>4</sup> In *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, Molière pushes to extremes the identification between a dramatic character and the actor who performs that character: in the original production, the real Molière played the character named Molière who represented the real Molière as playwright, director, and actor. I will hereafter distinguish between "the character Molière" as he appears in *L'Impromptu de Versailles* and "Molière," the playwright whose salon scenes I am studying.

surrenders and accepts a chair, and the rest of the company can finally sit down. In Article XVI of “Les Loix de la galanterie,” Sorel ironically explains how to be uncivil to a person who does not deserve one’s esteem: “gardez vous bien de marcher après eux, mais prenez le devant [...] pour leur monstrier que ce n’est pas à eux à limiter vostre ceremonie, et que vous ne faictes que ce qui vous plaist, sans y estre obligé.”<sup>5</sup>

Conversely, anyone demanding respect must be invited to proceed first, whether walking or sitting. As long as the chairs remain unoccupied, however, the salons in *La Comtesse d’Ecarbagnas* and *L’Impromptu de Versailles* are temporarily on hold.

Occasionally, a guest is unwilling to accept a chair that has been politely offered. In *Le Misanthrope* (II, iii-iv), Alceste is initially reluctant to stay with Célimène when she interrupts their tête-à-tête in order to welcome four other visitors, saying “Des sièges pour tous.” The misanthropic Alceste scorns what he perceives as the hypocritical civility of salon interaction: “Ces conversations ne font que m’ennuyer, / Et c’est trop que de vouloir me les faire essayer.” However, when he sees two other suitors Acaste and Clitandre among Célimène’s guests, he suddenly changes his tune and accepts a chair. He claims that he is staying in order to force Célimène to finally chose a lover among her suitors: “Aujourd’hui vous vous expliquerez [...] Vous vous déclarerez [...] Vous prendrez parti [...] vous choisirez; c’est trop de patience.” Behind this imperious façade, Alceste’s passionate love for the coquette Célimène reduces him to a much more subservient role. Indeed, he decides to take a chair with the other salonniers because he fears that Acaste or Clitandre would gain her heart in his absence. Later in the same play,

---

<sup>5</sup> Sorel, *Nouveau recueil*, 45. Sorel evokes in this oblique manner other civilities related to salon sitting, namely the offering of a nicer chair to one’s interlocutor or a chair that is better placed (i.e., closer to the host or guest of honor).



Célimène offers a chair to her older rival Arsinoé when she pays a surprise visit (III, iv): “Voulons-nous nous asseoir?” Arsinoé flatly refuses the polite gesture and the two women remain standing as they engage in a long discussion, the superficial civility of which hardly conceals the violent aggression between them. Their antagonism manifests physically in the refusal to sit together, much like the sisters’ apathy in *Les Précieuses ridicules* is revealed in their reluctance to offer chairs to La Grange and Du Croisy.

The most amusing complications introduced by Molière in this chair-offering scenario are the blunders performed by the servants ordered to set them up. In three of his plays, *La Critique* (iv), *La Comtesse d’Escarbagnas* (I, ii), and *Les Femmes savantes* (III, ii), the requested chair is incorrectly presented by the servant. The two latter plays feature hostesses whose salient traits are affectation and snobbism. By demanding chairs for their guests, they are demonstrating their civility, refinement, and social standing. This ambition is thwarted by their servants’ behavior, leaving the hostesses surprised and embarrassed. The servants’ blunders draw further attention to the formal social performance that has been frustrated. Nobody comes when the comtesse d’Escarbagnas demands assistance at her residence in Angoulême, and the more she cries out, the more ridiculous she appears: “Allons, des sièges. Holà! Laquais, laquais. En vérité, voilà qui est violent, de ne pouvoir pas avoir un laquais, pour donner des sièges. Filles, laquais, laquais, filles, quelqu’un. Je pense que tous mes gens sont morts, et que nous serons contraintes de nous donner des sièges nous-mêmes.” Despite what is suggested by the phrase, “Filles, laquais, laquais, filles, quelqu’un,” the comtesse does not have a large service staff at her disposal – only one lackey, one maid, and the occasional service of “maître Charles” whom she qualifies as her rider. Still, a solitary servant responding to

the call of duty is better than no servant at all. When her lackey and maid finally arrive, the comtesse severely reprimands them for their unresponsiveness and bad manners. In the course of just a few lines, she manages to call him “petit fripon de laquais,” “petit coquin,” “petit impertinent,” “petit fripon,” “petit incorrigible,” and her “sotte,” “insolente,” and “impertinente,” “tête de bœuf,” “étourdie,” “cette maladroite, cette bouvière, cette butorde, cette...” When the comtesse exclaims, “Vive Paris pour être bien servie!” in front of her guest Julie, she believes that her surprise and consternation over the provincial mediocrity of her servants bespeaks her cosmopolitan refinement and taste. Actually, her sudden display of anger, teeming with insults and name-calling, reflects her own provincial crudeness. Her politeness toward her guest thereafter appears particularly affected.

Philaminte’s hot temper similarly clashes with salon sociability in *Les Femmes savantes* (III, i). When the “bel esprit” Trissotin visits Philaminte, her daughter Armande, and sister-in-law Bélise, the three hostesses compete to show off their wit and eloquence. Philaminte then commands, “Allons, petit garçon, vite de quoi s’asseoir,” after which a lackey stumbles and falls with the chair. Philaminte, whose pretentiousness is coupled with a frightfully bad temper, thunders, “Voyez l’impertinent! Est-ce que l’on doit choir, / Après avoir appris l’équilibre des choses?” Steeped in study and her ambition to create a female Academy of Science and Letters, Philaminte is referring to the laws of physics when she evokes “l’équilibre des choses.” Bélise chimes in with this explanation: “De ta chute, ignorant, ne vois-tu pas les causes, / Et qu’elle vient d’avoir du point fixe écarté / Ce que nous appelons centre de gravité?” Philaminte calls her lackey a “lourdaud” and her anger diminishes only when Trissotin offers this light-hearted joke:

“Bien lui prend de n’être pas de verre.” In *Les Femmes savantes*, as in *La Comtesse d’Escarbagnas*, it is less the inability of the servant to correctly present a chair than the violent reaction of the hostess that reflects badly on her. Argan in *Le Malade imaginaire* (I, ii) calls Toinette by every name in the book when she arrives late to serve him, but his behavior stems from his obsession with his inexistent maladies. Arnolphe in *L’École des femmes* verbally abuses his ineffective servants Georgette and Alain in his foolish desire to have an ideally submissive and devoted wife. Such delusional behavior in elderly men is less condemnable and more pitiful than the rage of these younger ladies, motivated by the vices of affectation and snobbery. When their exaggerated ambition to show off is thwarted, their violent reaction defies the salon protocols of ease and pleasure. It is as if Molière were using the servants’ gaffe to punish the hostesses for their affectation by revealing the maliciousness behind it.

This logic of retribution does not apply to the servant’s blunder in *La Critique*, however. The lackey Galopin tries to prevent an annoyingly pretentious marquis from gaining access to Uranie’s salon. The marquis sees plainly that Uranie is present, though Galopin insists that she is absent. As the marquis forces his way into the gathering, the following exchange takes place between the lackey and his mistress:

Galopin: Je lui dis que vous n’y êtes pas, Madame, et il ne veut pas laisser d’entrer.  
 Uranie: Et pourquoi dire à Monsieur que je n’y suis pas?  
 Galopin: Vous me grondâtes, l’autre jour, de lui avoir dit que vous y étiez.  
 Uranie: Voyez cet insolent! Je vous prie, Monsieur, de ne pas croire ce qu’il dit. C’est un petit écervelé, qui vous a pris pour un autre [...] Un siège donc, impertinent.  
 Galopin: N’en voilà-t-il pas un?  
 Uranie: Approchez-le.  
*Le petit laquais pousse le siège rudement.*  
 Le Marquis: Votre petit laquais, Madame, a du mépris pour ma personne.

Galopin’s apparent rudeness toward the marquis thus corresponds with Uranie’s secret aversion for the same character, an aversion that she hides in the marquis’s presence

under a mask of civility. As Uranie's servant, Galopin has an obligation to support her desire to maintain that social mask, assuring that her private feelings remain private. His blunder lies in his faithfulness to his mistress's true feelings, exposed when he refuses to present the marquis with a chair and then roughly pushes it forward. Uranie endeavors to preserve her social mask by distancing herself from her servant's rude behavior.

Feigning shock, she asks Galopin why he has dishonestly told the marquis that she is absent. When he ingenuously replies "Vous me grondâtes..." the ensuing insults "Voyez cet insolent!" and "C'est un petit écervelé" come from a desperate hostess caught in her own trap of false appearances. She hoped her lackey would pull her out of this trap, but his unexpected honesty has obliged her to reveal and redirect her aversion from the marquis to him. Uranie's anger toward Galopin serves outwardly to ingratiate herself with the marquis; the ploy works, for the marquis does not attribute the lackey's incivility to his mistress ("Votre petit laquais, Madame, a du mépris pour ma personne."). In reality, her anger is a reaction to her idiotic servant's unintentional betrayal. In this salon situation, the hostess's anger is not symptomatic of her affectation and maliciousness, unlike the anger of the comtesse and Philaminte. Indeed, Uranie is one of the most reasonable, moderate, well-spoken characters in Molière's theater. Molière has no reason to dramatically "punish" her for her foibles. Given the marquis's unwelcome intrusion and the lackey's unwelcome candor, this demonstration of anger is the only reasonable means by which Uranie can preserve an air of civility, at the price of honesty, between the marquis and herself.

Molière's representation (or misrepresentation) of the rite initiating a salon, in which chairs are formally demanded by host(esse)s and arranged by their servants in the

presence of their guests, is unique in seventeenth-century depictions of salon culture. In the fictional narratives of Scudéry, de Pure, and Sorel, the testimonies of Sévigné, and the accounts found in *Le Mercure galant*, there is never a mention of servants being asked to arrange chairs for salonniers. In Scudéry's *Conversations*, salon gatherings occasionally take place in small cabins where chairs are already at hand, rendering a servant's assistance unnecessary. In *La Précieuse* by de Pure, many of the salon gatherings are scheduled beforehand; the hostess presumably organizes the sitting area prior to the arrival of her guests. Other situations undoubtedly require the assistance of a servant in order to seat one's guests, but this detail seems to have been deemed unworthy of mention. Why does Molière insist on representing it at the beginning of his salons? One might argue that it is necessitated by his medium. Theatrical verisimilitude would not permit salonniers to fetch their own chairs. Remember how irritated the comtesse d'Escarbagnas becomes at the idea "que nous serons contraintes de nous donner des sièges nous-mêmes."<sup>6</sup> Why does Molière not require the stage to be already equipped with the necessary chairs at the salon's onset? I believe that he represents this rite so conspicuously for two principal reasons. First, it serves to offset salon interaction from the rest of his play, a distinction which is also reflected in the characters' behavior as salonniers, as the next section will demonstrate. Secondly, the involvement of a servant in the ritualistic opening of a salon is highly symbolic in a theatrical context. In my second chapter, I studied the possibility for salonniers to engage in buffoonery and physical humor in a performance without necessarily endangering their general social image of refinement and dignity. In Molière's salons, however, physical humor is

---

<sup>6</sup> If Uranie in *La Critique* (v) tells her guest Lysidas, "prenez un siège vous-même, et vous mettez là," it is because his modest stature as a minor "auteur" calls for a lesser degree of deference.

generally relegated to servant characters. The servant, representing the ill manners and physical humor of traditional comedy and farce, literally prepares the stage for a new type of comedy based on the performance of politeness among the elite, the comedy of manners. The transition from one type of comedy to the other can prove at times rocky as the servant fumbles with the chair, refuses or neglects to present it, or shoves it rudely before the guest. Molière thus dramatizes the meeting of two theatrical and social realms, exploiting the comical potential that this meeting offers.

In her study of Molière's plays, the historian Sabine Chaouche evokes the singularity of his frequent use of chairs, but she does not consider how the chair is used to formalize and offset the representation of salon culture. Chaouche notes that in Pierre Corneille's plays, characters are often represented talking while standing in the street or in a square.<sup>7</sup> In traditional seventeenth-century tragic theater, seated characters are normally members of royalty ceremoniously engaged in deliberations, public hearings, and other actions related to their official capacity.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Molière's comedies feature seated characters who are not members of royalty and whose seated position corresponds with the representation, innovative at the time, of "les usages civils." Chaouche clearly distinguishes between the ceremony and solemnity of the seated monarch, whose speech and gestures reflect the formal art of declamation, and the apparently informal urbanity of Molière's salonniers who "ne semblent plus véritablement 'déclamer,' mais discuter dans l'intimité."<sup>9</sup> However, it is important to

---

<sup>7</sup> Chaouche, *L'art du comédien*, 175.

<sup>8</sup> Chaouche, *L'art du comédien*, 179.

<sup>9</sup> Chaouche, *L'art du comédien*, 176, 181.

realize that though Molière's seated characters are not engaged in outwardly ceremonious verbal and physical behavior, and though they are assuming a "position que tout-un-chacun adopte ordinairement dans la vie mondaine," the practice of conversation, both in real salons and in Molière's, was not void of formality beneath an air of naturalness. When Chaouche imagines the original performances of Molière's salons, she claims, "Le public ne semblait plus assister à une représentation mais appartenir à un cercle d'amis, témoin privilégié des conversations entre des mondains qui lui ressemblaient étrangement," an impression reinforced by the presence of seated audience members on stage around the actors.<sup>10</sup> This statement is based on a rather limited conception of performance in which theatrical declamation is the defining feature. It is undoubtedly true that Molière designed his salons to closely resemble the behavior of his contemporaries in their salons. However, such behavior was also approached as a type of performance, a social performance. It is precisely through his characters' request and presentation of chairs that Molière underscores the formality and performed quality underlying the apparent naturalness and artlessness of salon interaction.

---

<sup>10</sup> Chaouche, *L'art du comédien*, 176.

IMAGE NOT AVAILABLE

Clockwise from upper left: *Recueil Fossard*

untitled: *commedia dell'arte*

(anonymous, sixteenth century)

Pierre Louis Duchartre, *The Italian Comedy* (New York: Dover, 1966)

“L’Agréement aux Dames:

Frequentez bal ou Comédie / Mais avant de sortir prenez un Lavement / Cela  
s’appelle un Agréement / En terme de Gallenterie”

(N. Arnoult, late seventeenth century) BnF: Oa 52, C 914

“Femme de Qualité estante a ces necessitez”

(N. Arnoult, 1688) BnF: Oa 52, C 915

**Figure 7**



### ***When Characters Become Actors***

Once the chairs have been placed and the salonniers have taken their seats, the superperformance begins in Molière's theater. Instead of communicating, characters seem to perform for each other, using the salon context to demonstrate their verbal refinement, intelligence, good taste, and mastery of the codes of civility. This social performance varies from comical affectation to the tasteful demonstration of wit to outpourings of sheer eloquence. Molière's actors representing salonniers thus enter a second degree of performance as these salonniers perform the play of sociability.

Salon superperformance is most clearly demonstrated by the following comical character types: the marquis, the *précieuse*, and the pedant. The marquis de Mascarille sets a strong precedent in *Les Précieuses ridicules*. In reality a lackey masquerading as a marquis, Mascarille manages to insinuate himself in the salon and in the hearts of the "pecques provinciales" Magdelon and Cathos, who would only accept the company of Paris's finest. From the moment he enters their residence on his *chaise*, a type of carriage transported by two men, to the moment he's chased away, denounced as a mere lackey and literally stripped of his aristocratic effects, Mascarille never ceases to feign culture and refinement. The "marquis incommode" in *La Critique*, who enters Uranie's salon despite the efforts of her lackey, combines affectation and stupidity. Once the lackey has rudely presented a chair for him, the marquis utters what he alone considers an entertaining joke in order to alleviate an awkward social situation. "C'est peut-être que je paye l'intérêt de ma mauvaise mine: hay, hay, hay, hay," he suggests, laughing contentedly at himself. The conversation in this salon is devoted mostly to an exchange of opinions concerning Molière's play *L'École des femmes*. The marquis categorically

condemns the play, repeating mechanically that it is “détestable.” He listens to the consternation in his voice, but is unable to explain and justify his censure. As he admits in (v), “je ne me suis pas seulement donné la peine de l’écouter.” His condemnation of the play serves less to enlighten his interlocutors than to display the dramatic forcefulness of his vehemence, which the *honnête homme* Dorante ironically qualifies as “souveraineté” in (vi). When Dorante offers solid arguments in the play’s defense, the marquis endeavors to silence them through a ludicrous singing performance:

Le Marquis: Je ne veux pas seulement t’écouter.

Dorante: Écoute-moi, si tu veux. Est-ce que dans la violence de la passion...?

Le Marquis: La, la, la, la, lare, la, la, la, la, la, la. (*Il chante.*)

Dorante: Quoi...?

Le Marquis: La, la, la, la, lare, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la.

Uranie: Il me semble que...

Le Marquis: La, la, la, lare, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la.

Uranie: Il se passe des choses assez plaisantes dans notre dispute. Je trouve qu’on en pourrait bien faire une petite comédie, et que cela ne serait pas trop mal à la queue de l’*École des femmes*.

This tactic by the marquis is reminiscent of small children who plug their ears and sing in order to avoid hearing what displeases them.<sup>11</sup> The marquis is a figure who does not contribute meaningfully to salon conversation, but uses this discursive context as an opportunity to show off. As the character Molière in *L’Impromptu de Versailles* notes in (i): “Le marquis aujourd’hui est le plaisant de la comédie; et comme dans toutes les comédies anciennes on voit toujours un valet bouffon qui fait rire les auditeurs, de même, dans toutes nos pièces de maintenant, il faut toujours un marquis ridicule qui divertisse la compagnie”; and in (iii): “la plupart de ces messieurs affectent une manière de parler

<sup>11</sup> I am convinced that this singing “performance” is done with an open mouth and considerable vocal projection. It differs from the “La, la, la, la, la, la” sung by the marquis represented by the actor La Grange in *L’Impromptu de Versailles* (iii). La Grange’s marquis is said to enter the scene combing his wig and “grondant une petite chanson entre [ses] dents.” He is singing to himself during a promenade. In *La Critique*, on the other hand, the marquis must sing loud enough to drown out Dorante’s objections. Moreover, if Couton’s edition of Molière’s text accurately reflects original stage practice, the “lare” in the middle of the “la, la”s could not be sounded distinctly if the marquis were singing between his teeth, as in *L’Impromptu de Versailles*.

particulière, pour se distinguer du commun.” Through the evolution of theatrical comedy, physical humor gives way to psychological humor. The demonstrative buffoon is replaced by the delusional marquis whose outrageous performance rightfully belongs not to a theater filled with “spectators,” but in a salon of polite “company.”

The *précieuse* is a comical figure of predilection in Molière’s salons. Her salient characteristics, as depicted by seventeenth-century satirists, are affectation, flowery language, unnatural deportment, snobbishness, feminism, literary ambition, ambivalence toward the erotic, and a penchant for the esoteric.<sup>12</sup> The figure of the *précieuse* appears in *Les Précieuses ridicules* (Cathos, Magdelon), *La Critique* (Climène), *Les femmes savantes* (Philaminte, Bélise, Armande), and *La comtesse d’Escarbagnas* (title role). In *La Critique* (ii), Élise describes Climène in the following terms: “[C’est] la plus grande façonnière du monde. Il semble que tout son corps soit démonté, et que les mouvements de ses hanches, de ses épaules et de sa tête n’aillent que par ressorts. Elle affecte toujours un ton de voix languissant et niais, fait la moue pour montrer une petite bouche, et roule les yeux pour les faire paraître grands.” The principal feature that renders the *précieuse* so comical is her inability to realize the ridiculousness of her social comportment. The term “précieuse, à prendre le mot dans sa plus mauvaise signification” connotes affectation and exaggeration. However, no *précieuse* would qualify herself as such: “elle se défend du nom, mais non pas de la chose; car enfin elle l’est depuis les pieds jusqu’à la tête.” Like the marquis, the *précieuse* performs socially in an ostentatious manner and is herself most pleased by this performance. In *Les Femmes savantes* (III, ii), for example, Philaminte’s circle of *précieuses* implores the poet Trissotin to read aloud his sonnet.

---

<sup>12</sup> See Myriam Maître’s landmark study on the image of the *précieuse* and its evolutions throughout the seventeenth century, *Les précieuses / Naissance des femmes de lettres en France au XVIIe siècle*.

However, every time he attempts his reading, Bélise interrupts him in order to elegantly express her passion for gallant poetry: “À chaque fois qu’il veut lire, elle l’interrompt. Je sens d’aise mon cœur tressaillir par avance. / J’aime la poésie avec entêtement / Et surtout quand les vers sont tournés galamment.” In his preface to *Les Précieuses ridicules*, Molière defends himself against public outcry by distinguishing between “les véritables précieuses,” salonnières whose taste, refinement, and respectability are irreproachable, and “les précieuses ridicules” whom he claims to satirize. He describes the latter as “de mauvais singes” who “imitent mal” those who are “les plus excellentes.” It is their conspicuous effort to imitate others, to perform an artificial character, that results in affectation.<sup>13</sup> Admittedly, salon culture demands of its adherents some sort of social performance. However, the “ressorts” of that performance (i.e., the effort, motivation, and calculation behind it) are not supposed to appear. Climène’s manner of pouting her lips and rolling her eyes is inappropriate, for through it is revealed her desire to affect a certain look (i.e., “pour montrer une petite bouche,” “pour les faire paraître grands”). The affected *précieuse* is a bad actress endeavoring to represent *l’honnêteté* in salon interaction.

The pedant in Molière’s theater is usually a poet whose vanity and pretentiousness far exceed the quality of his verse. The character Molière in *L’Impromptu de Versailles* (ii) tells an actor representing a pedantic poet to “marquer cet air pédant qui se conserve parmi le commerce du beau monde, ce ton de voix sentencieux, et cette exactitude de

---

<sup>13</sup> Of course, the characters Magdelon and Cathos are widely recognized by Molière’s contemporaries as satirical representations of two of the most celebrated Parisian salonnières of the seventeenth century, Madeleine de Scudéry and Catherine de Rambouillet. By claiming to satirize “de mauvais singes,” Molière avoids offending mainstream salon culture. Without this decoy, *Les Précieuses ridicules* would intimate that salon culture is generally affected in its endeavors to realize its own ideals.

prononciation qui appuie sur toutes les syllabes, et ne laisse échapper aucune lettre de la plus sévère orthographe.” The poet is often asked to read aloud one of his compositions for salon company and it is during this performance that he shows off his scrupulous diction. The most notable example of this salon performance is Trissotin’s reading of his “Sonnet à la Princesse Uranie sur sa fièvre” in *Les Femmes savantes*. The pedantic poet’s expert opinion on other literary works is also frequently solicited in salon company. In *La Critique* (vi), the poet and literary connoisseur Lysidas arrives late because he has supposedly been retained in the salon of “Madame la Marquise” by compliments following his reading of his play. Before expressing any opinion in Uranie’s salon on *L’École des femmes*, Lysidas urges his hostess to reserve a seat at his play without delay. Only then turning to the subject of this salon’s conversation, Lysidas criticizes Molière’s comedy as a “bagatelle” catering to both the masses in the parterre and the decadent taste of court culture, unlike the “grands ouvrages,” namely his own compositions:

[...] on m’avouera que ces sortes de comédies ne sont pas proprement des comédies, et qu’il y a une grande différence de toutes ces bagatelles à la beauté des pièces sérieuses. Cependant tout le monde donne là-dedans aujourd’hui: on ne court plus qu’à cela, et l’on voit une solitude effroyable aux grands ouvrages, lorsque des sottises ont tout Paris. Je vous avoue que le cœur m’en saigne quelquefois, et cela est honteux pour la France.

Lysidas pronounces esoteric terms like “la protease, l’épitase, et la péripétie” to dazzle his interlocutors and to argue that Molière’s play defies the rules of dramatic art established since antiquity. Lysidas uses Molière’s play and the salon setting to parade his intellect through eloquent discourses that have undoubtedly been performed in other salon gatherings. The marquis, the *précieuse*, and the pedant in *La Critique* use Uranie’s salon not only to express their interpretation of Molière’s play, but to perform it (*interpréter*) with “leurs grimaces affectés” and “les mines qu’[ils] affect[ent],” to use

Uranie's language in (iii). The theatrical performance of *L'École des femmes* thus serves as a pretext for their exaggerated social performance.

Variants on Molière's model of the pedantic poet can be found in *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* and *Le Malade imaginaire*. In the first play, Monsieur Tibaudier, a provincial lawyer, endeavors to court the comtesse by composing "deux petits versets, ou couplets" for her and reciting it in her salon. Their measure is irregular, their expression is faulty ("[...] de ma foi, dont l'unique est l'espèce"), as is their imagery ("une peau de tigresse, / Qui couvre vos appas la nuit comme le jour"). The comtesse recognizes the poor quality of this poetry, but she appreciates Tibaudier's gallant gesture: "il y a peut-être quelque mot qui n'est pas de l'Académie; mais j'y remarque un certain respect qui me plaît beaucoup" (I, v). The salon thus provides an ideal setting for the poet's performance of courtship, which combines passion and literary sensibility. In *Le Malade imaginaire*, the medical student Thomas Diafoirus pays a visit to Argan who has promised his daughter Angélique to him. In Argan's salon, Thomas Diafoirus courts Angélique by offering her a copy of his lengthy medical thesis, and by paying her a longwinded compliment that has been prepared and memorized. In this discourse, obscure scientific phenomena are cited as metaphors for her beauty and his love. Argan, who is thrilled to have a future doctor as a son-in-law, tells Angélique to perform a song for the company. Angélique politely obeys by performing a passionate duet with her singing teacher, who is actually her lover Cléante in disguise. The pedant in Molière's salons is a perpetual performer eager to show off his bookish intelligence. The more he endeavors to render a brilliant performance, the more his performance falls ridiculously flat in the eyes of Molière's audience.

With regard to the comical figures of the marquis, the *précieuse*, and the pedant, one might contend that their affected social behavior is not limited to the salon. Uranie and Dorante in *La Critique* (iii, v) allude to certain *précieuses* and “messieurs du bel air” at the theater. As members of an audience, they ostentatiously manifest their disapproval of a stage performance while watching it. This affected behavior is regarded by the other members of the audience as “une seconde comédie.” In *Les Précieuses ridicules*, Cathos and Magdelon speak just as affectedly in private, to their father Gorgibus (iv), and to their maid Marotte (vi) as in their salon. The lackey playing the marquis de Mascarille never once lets down his mask; he continues to affect aristocratic airs even when the salon has been disrupted and his clothes have been stripped. Nonetheless, after Mascarille has taken his seat with his hostesses, his body language announces the formality of salon interaction. Before opening the conversation, he takes the time to comb his wig and adjust his frills, as if he were preparing himself for a special performance. The salon does not necessarily incite the marquis, the *précieuse*, and the pedant to alter or further exaggerate their characteristic affectation. However, it provides them with the ideal forum to perform, away from the hassles of domestic life (e.g., supervising and reprimanding one’s servants) and public life (e.g., getting around in Paris “contre les insultes de la boue et du mauvais temps”). It is in polite, leisurely conversation about society, gallantry, fashion, and art that their comical affectation can manifest most freely.

It is also important to note that the superperformance of salon conversation in Molière’s theater is not restricted to comical affectation. Indeed, even “reasonable,” clearly unaffected characters express themselves with a distinct performed quality in the

context of a salon. Take, for example, Dorante in *La Critique*, who defends Molière's play against the criticisms of Climène, the marquis, and Lysidas. In the fifth scene, Dorante complains about those who criticize and degrade all works of art in order to distinguish themselves. Through such criticism, they reveal their ignorance and lack of judgment; they "prennent par où ils peuvent les termes de l'art qu'ils attrapent, et ne manquent jamais de les estropier, et de les mettre hors de place." Dorante concludes his diatribe with the following apostrophe: "Eh, morbleu! Messieurs, taisez-vous, quand Dieu ne vous a pas donné la connaissance d'une chose; n'apprêtez point à rire à ceux qui vous entendent parler, et songez qu'en ne disant mot, on croira peut-être que vous êtes d'habiles gens." The marquis fears that Dorante is directly addressing him. However, personal attacks on one's interlocutors are not tolerated in the salon; as Philaminte in *Les Femmes savantes* (IV, iii) remarks, "On souffre aux entretiens ces sortes de combats / Pourvu qu'à la personne on ne s'attaque pas." One must find ways to disguise and divert one's insult (e.g., speaking in generalities or through allegory, describing an absent person, joking). Thus Uranie pronounces this famous apology of Molière's theater in (vi), recalling the salon protocol of polite indirection: "Ces sortes de satires tombent directement sur les mœurs, et ne frappent les personnes que par réflexion. N'allons point nous appliquer à nous-mêmes les traits d'une censure générale; et profitons de la leçon, si nous pouvons, sans faire semblant qu'on parle à nous." Dorante insists in (v) that his harangue is not directed at the marquis, but to "une douzaine de messieurs qui déshonorent les gens de cour par leurs manières extravagantes et font croire parmi le peuple que nous nous ressemblons tous." This harangue, eloquent yet unaffected, is instilled with such dramatic vigor that it seems to transcend the intimate salon on stage



and address the vast theater audience watching the salon. Dorante thus uses the theatrical context to save face in front of the other fictional salonniers. His speech, ambiguously directed at the marquis and/or “une douzaine de messieurs” in the audience, is both theatrical and socially based in a polite conversation.

The character Dorante in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (IV, i) manages to deliver an affected performance in a polite social setting without personally appearing affected. The Dorante in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* is more duplicitous and thrifty than in *La Critique*. He hoodwinks his mistress, the marquise Dorimène, and the bourgeois arriviste Monsieur Jourdain by encouraging Monsieur Jourdain in his lavish, anonymous courtship of Dorimène. Meanwhile, Dorante gains Dorimène’s affections by presenting Monsieur Jourdain’s generous offerings as his own. The scene in question finds Dorimène and Dorante at the residence of Monsieur Jourdain who has financed a bountiful meal, a dinner salon, so to speak. Dorante has organized and presented this feast to Dorimène on his own behalf. The ruse is almost disclosed when Dorimène compliments Dorante, to which Monsieur Jourdain replies, “Vous vous moquez, Madame, et je voudrais qu’il fût plus digne de vous être offert.” After the three salonniers have taken their seats at the table, Dorante pronounces the following discourse in order to divert Dorimène’s attention from Monsieur Jourdain’s last statement:

Monsieur Jourdain a raison, Madame, de parler de la sorte, et il m'oblige de vous faire si bien les honneurs de chez lui. Je demeure d'accord avec lui que le repas n'est pas digne de vous. Comme c'est moi qui l'ai ordonné, et que je n'ai pas sur cette matière les lumières de nos amis, vous n'avez pas ici un repas fort savant, et vous y trouverez des incongruités de bonne chère, et des barbarismes de bon goût. Si Damis, notre ami, s'en était mêlé, tout serait dans les règles; il y aurait partout de l'élégance et de l'érudition, et il ne manquerait pas de vous exagérer lui-même toutes les pièces du repas qu'il vous donnerait, et de vous faire tomber d'accord de sa haute capacité dans la science des bons morceaux, de vous parler d'un pain de rive, à biseau doré, relevé de croûte partout, croquant tendrement sous la dent; d'un vin à sève veloutée, armé d'un vert qui n'est point trop commandant; d'un carré de mouton gourmandé de persil; d'une longe de veau de rivière, longue comme cela, blanche, délicate, et qui sous les dents est une vraie pâte d'amande; de perdrix relevées d'un fumet surprenant; et pour son opéra, d'une soupe à bouillon perlé, soutenue

d'un jeune gros dindon cantonné de pigeonneaux, et couronnée d'oignons blancs, mariés avec la chicorée. Mais pour moi, je vous avoue mon ignorance; et comme Monsieur Jourdain a fort bien dit, je voudrais que le repas fût plus digne de vous être offert.

Through this witty discourse, Dorante is performing two impersonations. The first one is of the real host who has provided this meal, Monsieur Jourdain. When Dorante concurs that the meal is unworthy of Dorimène, he steals the words from Monsieur Jourdain's mouth and present them as his: "Je demeure d'accord avec lui que le repas n'est pas digne de vous [...] comme Monsieur Jourdain a fort bien dit, je voudrais que le repas fût plus digne de vous être offert." In the most criminal sense of the word, Dorante is "impersonating" the real host of this dinner salon. Still, he cannot perform this impersonation too openly without alerting Monsieur Jourdain. In order to detract from this deceitful tactic, Dorante performs yet another impersonation: of an absent pedant named Damis. Dorante is careful to clearly distinguish between Damis's affectation and his own talent in imitating this affectation. He initially refers to Damis as a separate person: "*il ne manquerait pas de vous exagérer lui-même toutes les pièces du repas qu'il vous donnerait, et de vous faire tomber d'accord de sa haute capacité dans la science des bons morceaux [...]*" Dorante then proceeds to represent Damis's affected speech and mannerisms through his own voice and gestures. He comically uses an elevated verbal style, combining savant terminology and poetic imagery, to describe their meal. As Uranie in *La Critique* (i) notes of such clever salon performances, Dorante does not present Damis's verbal style "comme une chose spirituelle [...] la plupart de ceux qui affectent ce langage savent bien eux-mêmes qu'il est ridicule." Dorante may seem to mock Damis's pretentiousness, but in reality, this affectation enables him to obliquely pay tribute to the sumptuousness of the meal and, therefore, to his own generosity toward Dorimène. She responds to Dorante's gallantry, "Je ne responds à ce compliment, qu'en

mangeant comme je fais.” Thus Dorante uses his impersonation of the affected Damis to dissimulate, on the one hand, his impersonation of the real host and to demonstrate, on the other hand, his gallantry to Dorimène. This concentration of three performances in one is another manner in which Molière represents the superperformance of the salon.

The act of disparagement thus constitutes a performance art in Molière’s salons. It takes the form of an eloquent harangue in *La Critique*, a comical impersonation in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, and in *Le Misanthrope* (II, iv) a scathing verbal portrait. The young, beautiful coquette Célimène impresses her guests with her ability to improvise such portraits in rapid succession. Indeed, the majority of this salon conversation is devoted to Célimène’s unflattering descriptions of absent persons. A guest need only name somebody and, like a machine, she unfailingly produces a portrait combining spite, wit, and verbal elegance. Alceste disapproves of this display and blames it on her audience’s malicious encouragement: “[...] vos ris complaisants / Tirent de son esprit tous ces traits médisants. / Son humeur satirique est sans cesse nourrie / Par le coupable encens de votre flatterie; / Et son cœur à railler trouverait moins d’appas, / S’il avait observé qu’on ne l’applaudit pas.” Alceste also accuses Célimène’s guests of hypocrisy, for they are otherwise complaisant toward the individuals they incite her to satirize: “Cependant aucun d’eux à vos yeux ne se montre, / Qu’on ne vous voie, en hate, aller à sa rencontre, / Lui présenter la main, et d’un baiser flatteur / Appuyer les serments d’être son serviteur.” Thus Alceste displaces his censure from Célimène, whom he genuinely loves, to the other men in Célimène’s salon, particularly the rival suitors Clitandre and Acaste.

Alceste disapproves of Célimène's penchant for malicious gossip, yet during their tête-à-tête in (II, i), he pronounces a satirical portrait of his rival Clitandre, mercilessly mocking his appearance, clothing, and voice. Alceste derides Clitandre in order to deprive him of Célimène's favor; his portrait is purely strategic. Célimène, on the other hand, seems to lose control of herself in her salon; relishing the praise and flattery that each portrait receives, she continues to perform them in order to prolong her glory. Indeed, Célimène's salon would have only entailed the succession of her verbal portraits instigated by her guests had Alceste not interjected, reprimanding her corrupt audience and trying to save his beloved from the shame of appearing malicious. However, Célimène's verbal abuse of those absent is integral to her sense of salon civility; she honors those present by confiding her satires to them. This honor is dubious, for her guests may wonder if she would similarly ridicule them in their absence.<sup>14</sup> Célimène's final portrait is both satirical and flattering: she mocks Alceste's misanthropy in his very presence. She thereby demonstrates to him that she is hiding nothing, that she feels free to attack him directly instead of hiding behind a façade of flattery and complaisance. Alceste exercises the same freedom to criticize her in her salon: "Plus on aime quelque'un, moins il faut qu'on le flatte; / À ne rien pardonner le pur amour éclate." If this exchange of reproaches implies a certain complicity between Célimène and Alceste, her satirical portrait of him is still a performance intended to impress and entertain the other

---

<sup>14</sup> In Article XV of "Les Loix de la galanterie," Sorel insists on a certain "adresse" when undertaking malicious gossip in a salon setting, so that "encore que veritablement l'on soit mesdisant, ceux qui vous escoutent ne se deffient point de vous et ne s'imaginent pas que vous soyez homme à les aller deschiffrer ailleurs, comme vous faictes des autres, d'autant que vous leur aurez rendu trop de civilité pour vous avoir en cette estime; et pourtant s'il y a lieu de les joüer quelque part, ne les épargnez pas, vue qu'il n'y a rien qui fasse tant rechercher vostre conversation que cette agreable raillerie." See Sorel, *Nouveau recueil*, 40.

members of her salon. As a coquette, Célimène not only basks in their admiration; she desperately needs it.

After he vents his anger and frustration, Alceste endeavors to put an end to Célimène's salon: "Et je bannirais, moi tous ces lâches amants / Que je verrais soumis à tous mes sentiments [...]" Célimène begins to lose her patience with Alceste; after having playfully referred to him in the third person ("Et ne faut-il pas bien que Monsieur contredise?"), she now addresses him directly: "Enfin, s'il faut qu'à vous s'en rapportent les cœurs..." The next time Alceste opens his mouth, Célimène cuts him off, "Brisons là ce discours." Éliante, Célimène's discreet and judicious cousin who is in love with Alceste, diverts the salonniers' attention from this conflict by offering another verbal portrait: a lover who interprets his beloved's faults as admirable qualities. Éliante's portrait is more poetic in style than Célimène's portraits: "La pâle est aux jasmins en blancheur comparable; / La noire à faire peur, une brune adorable [...] La fourbe a de l'esprit; la sotte est toute bonne [...] C'est ainsi qu'un amant dont l'ardeur est extreme / Aime jusqu'aux defaults des personnes qu'il aime." The imagery in this discourse follows a structured path, beginning with physical imperfections followed by behavioral ones. If Célimène offers portraits of specific individuals, Éliante seems to speak in generalities; her portrait resembles an extended maxim. In this salon featuring sharp satires and bitter reprimands, Éliante's sympathetic, poetic description of the lover blinded by his love may seem to come out of nowhere. It does not refer to Célimène's complaisant suitors whom Alceste qualifies as vain, hypocritical, and perfidious. It does not refer to the coquette Célimène who refuses to attach herself to anyone. It does not refer to Alceste whose love for Célimène renders him only more lucid and intolerant of

her flaws. Éliante is not even referring to herself, for she knows how to distinguish between Alceste's qualities and faults. As she later admits to Philinte in (IV, i), "Dans ses façons d'agir, il est fort singulier; / Mais j'en fais, je l'avoue, un cas particulier, / Et la sincérité dont son âme se pique, / A quelque chose, en soi, de noble et héroïque." Éliante admires Alceste's sincerity, though she does not approve of his "façons d'agir" nor a certain arrogance with which he demonstrates and imposes this sincerity ("la sincérité dont son âme se pique"). She loves both lucidly and compassionately. Upon closer inspection, Éliante's performance appears to reflect all that has been said in this salon. First of all, as she proceeds from one fault to another, from the "pâle" to the "malpropre" to the "naine" to the "orgueilleuse." Éliante imitates Célimène's manner of swiftly shifting from one portrait to another. Secondly, when Éliante translates faults into admirable qualities, she echoes the complaisance and flattery condemned by Alceste. However, the self-deluding lover's complaisance is not hypocritical; he can only see beauty where another would see a flaw in the same woman. Thirdly, if Célimène demonstrates through her performance her capacity for keen observation and sharp expression, Éliante demonstrates these same qualities, not by focusing on the weaknesses of an individual, but by reflecting on the delusions common to everyone. Without being pedantic, Éliante's salon performance is poetic and philosophical.

Thus, as the performances of the two Dorantes, Célimène, and Éliante show, the quality of superperformance in Molière's salons is not limited to ridiculous affectation. These performances demonstrate wit, perspicacity, elegance, and eloquence. Salon conversation, whether affected or tasteful, always constitutes a superperformance in Molière's theater. Once everyone is properly seated, the first words spoken set the tone

for a formal performance of sociability and polite expression: Mascarille's "Et bien, Mesdames, que dites-vous de Paris?"; Clitandre's "Parbleu! je viens du Louvre, où Cléonte, au levé, / Madame, a bien paru ridicule achevé"; Dorante's "Monsieur Jourdain a raison, Madame, de parler de la sorte, et il m'oblige de vous faire si bien les honneurs de chez lui"; Philaminte's "Servez-nous promptement votre aimable repas"; and Argan's "Vous voyez, Monsieur, que tout le monde admire Monsieur votre fils, et je vous trouve bien heureux de vous voir un garçon comme cela." The semantic content of these opening statements may appear banal on the page. However, the manner in which the words are pronounced reflects the speakers' attention to their verbal performance. Élise in *La Critique* ironically compliments Climène's affected choice of words:

Mon Dieu! que tout cela est dit élégamment! [...] Les jolies façons de parler que voilà! [...] Comment dites-vous ce mot-là, Madame? [...] Je ne sais ce que ce mot veut dire; mais je le trouve le plus joli du monde [...] [je] suis charmée de toutes les expressions qui sortent de votre bouche! [...] Celui-là est joli encore [...] Est-ce vous qui l'avez inventé, Madame?

Though Molière punishes Climène's affectation through ridicule, his salons are nonetheless settings in which all interlocutors pay special attention to their verbal, facial, and corporeal expression, in the manner of an actor.

### ***Acting Naturally***

I believe that the term "naturel" in *L'Impromptu de Versailles* refers, at least in part, to the performance of salon sociability. In this play, the character Molière pronounces the words "naturel" and "naturellement" on several occasions in order to identify what he considers to be proper acting. Scholars have long debated the term's meaning in the context of this play and have used it to shed light on Molière's general acting style. It has been suggested that Molière sought to depart from the formality, artifice, and conventionality of then-contemporary theatrical declamation. However, it

would be erroneous to presume that Molière sought to evacuate his performance art of formality and convention, anticipating the less oratorical, more intuitive and personal approach to acting promoted during the eighteenth century. Molière's natural dramatic style was inspired in part by the discursive and comportmental style of salonniers, also qualified as "naturel."

In *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, Molière qualifies his acting style as "natural" and in order to distinguish his company from his rivals at l'hôtel de Bourgogne. What does Molière mean by "natural"? In general, two interpretations have been proposed by critics. Many presume that "natural" implies the absence of "bombastic and declamatory methods" of acting, as Arthur Tilley has written in 1918.<sup>15</sup> They imagine a low-key, moderate manner of acting that parts from the traditional art of declamation in order to represent characters as ordinary people. Others question the absence of declamation in Molière's theater; they interpret "natural" acting to mean "appropriate for the character." Jean De Sales Bertram-Cox writes in 1965, "It seems to me that every study of Molière which I have read mentions that he advocated a natural style of delivery. What the master really says, however, is 'Suit the delivery to the character' [...] The declamatory style is a natural one to the character of the chevalier, but it is not a natural style of delivery."<sup>16</sup> However, as is shown through the salon protocol of naturalness, a declamatory style was most certainly not natural or typical for a chevalier. However, declamation was integral to all dramatic art in the seventeenth century. Thus in 1999 and 2001, Sabine Chaouche asserts that comic theater during this period, like tragic theater,

---

<sup>15</sup> Arthur Tilley, "Grimarest's Life of Molière." *The Modern Language Review* 13 (4) (Oct. 1918): 452.

<sup>16</sup> Jean De Sales Bertram-Cox, "A Definition of Tradition in the Production of Moliere Plays." *Educational Theatre Journal*. 17 (4) (Dec. 1965): 305-306.



had its distinct form of declamation to which Molière adheres.<sup>17</sup> All theatrical performances required an emphatic style of delivery: “c’est une convention de charger les vers.”<sup>18</sup> According to Chaouche, Molière’s use of the term ‘natural’ does refer to appropriateness, not only to character, but to dramatic situation and theatrical genre as well. Molière’s “natural” comic acting was a form of declamation; it was necessarily artificial according to the dictates of theatrical convention. Chaouche specifies that Molière faulted the Bourguignons not for declaiming, but for declaiming exaggeratedly and affectedly with respect to the standard of tragic declamation.

In my estimation, the specific meaning of the term “naturel” varies according to its immediate context in *L’Impromptu de Versailles*. First, the character Molière alludes in (i) to actors performing “le plus naturellement qu’il lui aurait été possible” or “le plus naturellement qu’ils auraient pu.” It is when an actor becomes overly emphatic and ostentatious that his acting is qualified by Molière as “unnatural.” The second use of the word appears when the character Molière ironically asks, “Voyez-vous comme cela est naturel et passionné?” to describe the actress Mlle Beauchâteau. She continues to smile pleasantly even when the text she pronounces is tragically poignant. The character Molière judges Beauchâteau’s facial expression inappropriate vis-à-vis the passion of her text. This inappropriateness, or unnaturalness, is not due to exaggeration as in the first example, but rather to incoherence. The first two occurrences of the term “naturel” thus refer to the conventions and formalities that define traditional theatrical acting. However,

---

<sup>17</sup> Sabine Chaouche, “A propos de l’Actio ‘naturelle’ prônée par Molière.”

<sup>18</sup> Chaouche, *L’art du comédien*, 264.

Molière's dramatic representation of salon culture implies a different set of conventions and formalities, as further occurrences of the word "naturel" seem to suggest.

The third occurrence of the word "naturel" also takes place in (i) when the character Molière reminds his actor Brécourt how to represent an *honnête homme* as he did in *La Critique* (the character of Dorante): "c'est-à-dire que vous devez prendre un air posé, un ton de voix naturel, et gesticuler le moins qu'il vous sera possible." During the seventeenth century, the term "gesticuler" generally signifies excessive gesturing while one speaks; the *honnête homme* avoids it in conversation. The verb is also commonly attributed to theatrical acting, which requires more frequent and exaggerated gesturing than conversation.<sup>19</sup> Thus, when the character Molière tells Brécourt to "gesticuler le moins qu'ils vous sera possible," he is instructing Brécourt to abandon traditional stage convention. During the troupe's rehearsal beginning in (iii), when Molière and another actor La Grange represent a dialogue between two marquis, Brécourt inadvertently imitates their affectation when he enters their conversation, which Molière immediately corrects: "Bon. Voilà l'autre qui prend le ton de marquis! Vous ai-je pas dit que vous faites un rôle où l'on doit parler naturellement?" Thus the *honnête homme* is a role that requires a "natural" manner of acting, distinct from marquis-like affectation, on the one hand, and emphatic, theatrical gesticulation, on the other.

It might be tempting to associate the *honnête homme*'s manner of performing with that of the orator, whose art of gesturing, relative to theatrical gesticulation, "doit être conforme au sujet, il faut de plus qu'il soit fort naturel & fort modeste," according to the

---

<sup>19</sup> Bary, *L'Esprit curieux*, 203: "Le recit ne demande ordinairement des gesticulations, que quand il est fait en public, la raison de cela est, que le Peuple est plus ému des actions que des choses [...] Quoy que le Recit pouvant reffermer cent choses différentes, puisse exiger divers mouvemens de corps, & diverses flexions de voix [...] le Recit ne souffre ordinairement le patetique, que quand il est sur le theatre."

rhetorician Michel Le Faucheur.<sup>20</sup> Le Faucheur associates the adjectives “naturel” and “modeste,” equating appropriateness with moderation. In *L’Impromptu de Versailles* (iv), when the character Molière demonstrates for Brécourt a lengthy discourse by an *honnête homme*, he insists on its oratorical delivery: “Attendez, il faut marquez davantage tout cet endroit.” Molière’s discourse features a succession of interrogations requiring the speaker to frequently raise his voice and “marquer” his words. He instructs Brécourt to abandon the conventional gesticulations and excesses of theatrical declamation in order to imitate the “natural” (or moderate) gestures and inflections of the orator in this speech.

Still, it is unlikely that the “ton de voix naturel” attributed to the *honnête homme* is necessarily that of an orator. Again, a declamatory style is not “natural” to the *honnête homme*, contrary to what Bertram-Cox has suggested. Though the *honnête homme* occasionally declaims like an orator (e.g., Dorante in *La Critique*), he more commonly performs as an ideal actor of salon sociability.<sup>21</sup> As the third chapter of my study has shown, if the *honnête homme* appears “natural” in the presence of other salonniers, it is because his nature has been cultivated and polished into a formal performance art. Molière uses the social conventions of the salon, distinct from the traditional conventions of theatrical declamation, to represent the art of civility on stage. These “natural”

---

<sup>20</sup> Le Faucheur, *Traité de l’Action de l’Orateur* in *Sept traités sur le jeu du comédien*, 181.

<sup>21</sup> One might even argue that Mlle Beauchâteau’s monotonous acting style is “unnatural” according to the aesthetics of salon comportment. Recall Méré, “Discours des Agrémens,” 2:16: “Je trouve la ressemblance des actions fort lassante, comme d’aborder frequemment d’une mesme mine, soit riante, ou triste, enjouée ou severe, et je prens garde que quelques personnes qui se piquent d’estre égales, quoy que d’ailleurs elles ne soient pas sans merite, déplaisent toûjours également. En effet cette égalité fade et sans goust qui paroist dans l’humeur et dans l’esprit de quelques gens, les rend bien desagreaables [...] Il seroit à souhaiter que toutes les passions que le sujet demande, se pussent sentir ou deviner sur le visage et dans l’air de ceux qui veulent plaire.”

conventions constitute during the second half of the seventeenth century a new type of theatrical *vraisemblance* that is at the same time *vrai*, or true to then-contemporary social practice. Just as the representation of the “tour aisé et naturel” in Maintenon’s *Conversations* at Saint-Cyr is recognized by certain visitors as a concerted performance, Molière brings to the forefront the performance art underlying salon interaction through his “natural” acting style.

Chaouche carries Molière’s naturalness even further by claiming that Molière’s entire theatrical style, and not only his salons, is based on the art of conversation.<sup>22</sup> She cites, for example, Jean Hindret’s claim in *L’art de prononcer parfaitement la langue française* that Molière relaxed his actors’ diction, requiring them not to pronounce certain final consonants. Molière’s diction thus approached the negligent diction of salons,<sup>23</sup> unlike the more rigorous diction of traditional theater, serving the audibility and intelligibility of the dramatic text. On the other hand, Chaouche surmises that Molière’s actors’ vocal inflection and projection could not be rendered “conversational” without compromising textual delivery. The shift from a declamatory to a “natural” style was, therefore, selective: “La déclamation ‘naturelle’ de Molière fut donc une réforme de la diction et non une réforme de la tonalité de la déclamation.”<sup>24</sup> I hasten to specify, however, that if Molière imposed on his actors a diction evoking that of salonniers, they

---

<sup>22</sup> Chaouche, *L’art du comédien*, 281-295.

<sup>23</sup> See Eugène Green, *La Parole baroque*, 95: « Le fait de ne pas articuler ces sons était donc tenu pour une ‘licence’ qui avait, selon le cas, et suivant un protocole assez bien établi, une valeur culturelle et sociale précise. Ainsi, dans certaines situations, la ‘négligence’ était de rigueur : à la cour on disait *i* pour *il* ou *ils*, et dans les salons on pouvait entendre *avè* pour *avec*, prononciations qui ailleurs auraient été de la plus grande vulgarité.”

<sup>24</sup> Chaouche, *L’art du comédien*, 298.

were not expected to behave like salonniers throughout his plays. Molière's characters are not salonniers; they *become* salonniers in a specific dramatic (and social) setting.

The salons represented in Molière's plays are offset by the formal action of arranging chairs and by the superperformance of civility. This shift in acting in Molière's theater from performance to superperformance, from the merely dramatic to the dramatic and social, is demonstrated not only by affected characters, but also by exemplary ones qualified as "honnêtes" and "naturels." The affected marquis and the ideal *honnête homme* do not suddenly change character when they leave a salon gathering. However, the salon provides them with the leisure and liberty to develop their respective social performances. Both the marquis and the *honnête homme* serve to represent, as counterexample and example, the "natural" style of acting that Molière promotes through his comedy of manners.

### ***The Performance of Complaisance***

As a satirist of contemporary manners, Molière uses the artistic practices of his fictional salonniers to problematize the quality of complaisance. Salon sociability is based on reciprocal complaisance: it is important to render oneself agreeable to one's interlocutors by demonstrating one's approval of what they say and do, offering them compliments when they are due, and endeavoring to make these polite social gestures appear as sincere as possible. In his representations of salon culture, however, Molière denounces the quality of complaisance as a vain, hypocritical, even egotistical social performance obstructing true communication. After a poetic recitation, for example, an obliging listener usually takes pleasure in simply repeating certain passages. This literary reception functions less as a reaction to the performance than as its reflection or

prolongation, serving to demonstrate the perspicacity of the listener. The protocol of complaisance thus precludes any exchange or confrontation of ideas, any real communication between the performer and the listener. By extension, all communication in the salon is compromised by the desire to please one's interlocutors in order to promote oneself. Molière also uses the representation of salon performance practice to reveal a disquieting correlation between complaisance and its polar opposite, malice. In two different salons, a lady professes admiration for a *précieuse* and demonstrates this admiration by imitating the latter's affected behavior. In reality, this supposedly flattering imitation is nothing but a malicious impersonation, a satirical performance brazenly executed in the presence of its victim. The impersonator's complaisance does not simply mask her malice; it is indistinguishable from it. Molière thus uses the superperformances of his salonniers to ironize the quality of complaisance: not only does it hamper communication by reducing conversation to self-serving reiteration, it can actually serve as a vehicle of aggression.

*Les Précieuses ridicules*, composed near the beginning of Molière's career, and *Les Femmes Savantes*, composed near the end of it, each feature the recitation of a poem by an affected poet in front of a circle of *précieuses*. The humor in this representation lies in the listeners' exaggerated enthusiasm for poetry which is obviously mediocre, if not simply bad. In *Les Précieuses ridicules*, the amateur poet Mascarille sings his own praises after reciting his impromptu, inciting Magdelon and Cathos to agree with him. In *Les Femmes Savantes*, the salonnières Philaminte, Bélise, and Armande interrupt Trissotin's recitation of his sonnet with breathless exclamations of delight. In both of these salon receptions, the listeners dissect the recited poem into isolated expressions and

words to be relished at leisure. Indeed, the poem's general structure and meaning is lost in the listeners' ambition to "faire la fortune des petites choses et de les dérober à la vue à force de les faire paraître grandes."<sup>25</sup> Through their complaisance toward the poet, the *précieuses* fulfill their desire to perform his poetry for themselves.

In *Les Précieuses ridicules* (ix), Mascarille takes the time to repeat and admire passages from his impromptu, especially "Oh! Oh!," "je vous regarde," and "Au voleur, au voleur, au voleur!" His hostesses chime in with their own repetitions and compliments:

Mascarille: Avez-vous remarqué ce commencement: *Oh, oh?* Voilà qui est extraordinaire: *oh, oh!*  
Comme un homme qui s'avise tout d'un coup: *oh, oh!* La surprise: *oh, oh!*  
Magdelon: Oui, je trouve ce *oh, oh!* admirable.  
Mascarille: Il semble que cela ne soit rien.  
Cathos: Ah! mon Dieu, que dites-vous? Ce sont là de ces sortes de choses qui ne se peuvent payer.  
Magdelon: Sans doute; et j'aimerais mieux avoir fait ce *oh, oh!* qu'un poème épique.

Mascarille toys with the salon protocol of complaisance when he modestly says, "Il semble que cela ne soit rien." He knows that Magdelon and Cathos will respond with even more enthusiastic compliments for his little "*Oh! Oh!*" if he seems to play it down. Not only do these salonnières repeat and compliment the fragments of the impromptu out of deference to Mascarille, they are flattered that he has offered to recite it in their salon. When Mascarille then undertakes a musical version of the same poem, even though "la brutalité de la saison a furieusement outragé la délicatesse de [sa] voix," Magdelon loses her customary composure to exclaim in ecstasy, "C'est là savoir le fin des choses, le grand fin, le fin du fin. Tout est merveilleux, je vous assure; je suis enthousiasmée de l'air et des paroles." Mascarille repeats from his impromptu the sentence, "je vous

---

<sup>25</sup> From Charles Cotin, "Discours sur les énigmes" in *Recueil des énigmes de ce temps* (Rouen: J. Cailloué, 1655).

regarde,” only to explain its simple meaning through more complicated language: “je vous regarde, c’est-à-dire, je m’amuse à vous considérer, je vous observe, je vous contemple.” The gloss thus becomes another opportunity to perform, to display one’s eloquence in order to provoke more compliments (“Tout à fait bien [...] Il ne se peut rien de mieux.”) Magdelon’s unbridled enthusiasm for Mascarille’s finesse is also self-flattering; she is proud to have recognized the subtle merit of “Oh! oh!” and “Au voleur!” She values them as abstractions of an indescribable beauty that can only be rendered through the dint of repetition. This favorable reception merely echoes the original recitation, flattering both the poet and his fine listeners.

In *Les Femmes savantes* (III, ii), the enthusiastic reception of a poem is so dramatic that it overshadows the original recitation. After Trissotin reads the first stanza of his “Sonnet à la Princesse Uranie sur sa fièvre,” the three *précieuses* indulge him with compliments one after another. They then proceed to repeat single words and expressions, enjoying them even more in their own voices. Bélise eventually asks Trissotin to continue his recitation: “Prêtons l’oreille au reste.” The performance thus promises to move forward instead of repeating itself idly in the salonnières’ delectation of small detail. However, such progress is not immediately forthcoming, for Trissotin seeks to prolong his listeners’ complaisance by repeating the first stanza in its entirety. Armande, Bélise, and Philaminte respond just as enthusiastically by repeating their favorite spots, also happy to prolong the performance of their enjoyment. Trissotin then moves to the second stanza, which makes the salonnières swoon in an admiration highly suggestive of sensual pleasure: “Ah! tout doux, laissez-moi, de grace, respirer. / Donnez-nous, s’il vous plait, le loisir d’admirer. / On se sent à ces vers, jusques au fond de l’âme,



/ Couler je ne sais quoi qui fait que l'on se pâme." Trissotin initiates in (III, i) this salon game of sexual innuendo by using the metaphor of carnal procreation to describe his poetic production and its salon reception:

Trissotin: Hélas! c'est un enfant tout nouveau-né, Madame.  
 Son sort assurément a lieu de vous toucher,  
 Et c'est dans votre cour<sup>26</sup> que j'en viens d'accoucher.  
 Philaminte: Pour me le rendre cher, il suffit de son père.  
 Trissotin: Votre approbation lui peut servir de mère.

Thus, pleasure in literature is a corporeal, hedonistic experience for these salonnières, recalling the voiced readings by Charles de Sévigné studied in my first chapter: "Mon fils a une qualité très commode, c'est qu'il est fort aise de relire deux fois, trois fois, ce qu'il a trouvé beau. Il le goûte, il y entre davantage, il le sait par cœur; cela s'incorpore. Il croit avoir fait ce qu'il lit ainsi pour la troisième fois."<sup>27</sup> The salonnières in *Les Femmes savantes* sensuously repeat their favorite words and expressions in order to incorporate and appropriate the text, transforming Trissotin's performance into theirs. The expression "quoi qu'on die" in the second stanza is isolated, repeated, glossed, and honored for its particular merit which the salonnières are proud to recognize. As Philaminte asks Trissotin, "Mais quand vous avez fait ce charmant *quoi qu'on die*, / Avez vous compris, vous, toute son énergie? / Songiez-vous bien vous-même à tout ce qu'il

---

<sup>26</sup> With reference to the term "cour," Georges Couton notes: "On peut hésiter entre le sens judiciaire de 'cour': tribunal; et le sens politique: le roi, son conseil, et ses ministres. Le mot de Philaminte (l. 755) ferait penser plutôt à tribunal." Philaminte's line to which Couton refers reads: "Donnons vite audience." I do not necessarily agree with Couton's interpretation of this passage. When Trissotin says that his poem is "un enfant tout nouveau-né [...] que je viens d'accoucher," he implies that that it is a freshly composed impromptu, not unlike Mascarille in *Les Précieuses ridicules* and Oronte in *Le Misanthrope*. Thus, after having arrived at Philaminte's residence, while waiting in her courtyard (a perfectly viable meaning of "cour") and before entering her salon, Trissotin composes his poem. As for Philaminte's subsequent statement, "donner" or "prêter audience" is a common expression used in salon culture to indicate when conversation gives way to silence prior to an artistic performance (multiple occurrences are found in *La Précieuse* by Michel de Pure and *Le Mercure galant* by Jean Donneau de Visé). The salonnières in *Les Femmes savantes* are enthusiastic about Trissotin's poem precisely because it was composed spontaneously under Philaminte's roof.

<sup>27</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 3:804.

nous dit, / Et pensiez-vous alors y mettre tant d'esprit?" she is suggesting that the true merit of "quoi qu'on die" has escaped the poet himself. It can only be appreciated by discerning listeners like herself. The real performance is not Trissotin's production and recitation of his sonnet, but the *précieuses*' reception of it. Philaminte, Bélise, and Armande pronounce one last time "quoi qu'on die" in a resounding chorus reflecting the depth and subtlety of their understanding. Philaminte's more down-to-earth daughter Henriette and Molière's audience realize that this expression is perfectly inconsequential.

The *précieuses*' admiration for Trissotin's trifling sonnet, dissected into even smaller, less significant parcels of language, constitutes a performance that stands out from the rest of Molière's play. If Philaminte swoons with pleasure and admiration for Trissotin, she is otherwise terrifying in her dialogues with her family. As her husband Chrysale admits to his brother in (II, ix):

Ma femme est terrible avecque son humeur.  
 Du nom de philosophe elle fait grand mystère;  
 Mais elle n'en est pas pour cela moins colère;  
 Et sa morale, faite à mépriser le bien,  
 Sur l'aigreur de sa bile opère comme rien.  
 Pour peu que l'on s'oppose à ce que veut sa tête,  
 On en a pour huit jours d'effroyable tempête.  
 Elle me fait trembler dès qu'elle prend son ton;  
 Je ne sais où me mettre, et c'est un vrai dragon;  
 Et cependant, avec toute sa diablerie,  
 Il faut que je l'appelle et "mon cœur" et "ma mie."

Ariste attributes Philaminte's imperious nature to her husband's cowardice. She is just as frightening when Henriette resists her choice of fiancé in (III, v): "Savez-vous bien que si... Suffit, vous m'entendez." To see such a tyrannical woman transform into a doting admirer in the presence of a mediocre poet is a dramatic performance shift, to say the least. Her complaisance and that of Bélise and Armande seem to be sincere. The salon enables them to take pleasure in the beauty of language, broken down into its most

abstract and meaningless form. Time stands still (“Donnez-nous, s’il vous plait, le loisir d’admirer”) as the same words repeat themselves sensuously in their mouths. As in *La Précieuse* by Michel de Pure and the *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise* by Jean-Louis Le Cerf de La Viéville, the association between poetry and gastronomy is apparent in *Les Femmes savantes*, for whom poetry must be broken down, digested, in a word, *dégustée*. The poet thus derives a narcissistic pleasure from this literary reception which only mirrors his original performance.

The representation of complaisance in *Les Précieuses ridicules* and *Les Femmes savantes* is ridiculously exaggerated. Molière uses this technique of caricature to draw attention to a common tendency among salonniers following the recitation or voiced reading of a work by its author. Molière uses the opposite portrayal, an openly harsh literary reception, in order to make the same point in *Le Misanthrope*. I am referring, of course, to the sonnet scene (I, ii) between Oronte, Alceste, and Philinte. While awaiting Célimène’s return to her apartment, Alceste has been suffering the company of Philinte, a good humored, easy-going gentleman who endeavors to deter him from his misanthropic tendencies. Oronte enters Célimène’s apartment and approaches Alceste in order to strike up conversation. Though Alceste does not know him very well, he knows that Oronte is yet another one of Célimène’s suitors. Still, as Alceste will tell Éliante in (IV, ii), Oronte does not seem to pose a serious threat: “Oronte, dont j’ai cru qu’elle fuyait les soins, / Et que de mes rivaux je redoutais le moins.” Upon Oronte’s arrival, Alceste is said to appear “*tout rêveur, et semble n’entendre pas qu’Oronte lui parle.*” Either Alceste is only pretending to be lost in thought in order to avoid a conversation with Oronte, or he really is ruminating over Célimène’s flippant ways and the flaws of

humanity in general, as debated in the preceding scene with Philinte. Oronte immediately offers his friendship to Alceste, endeavoring to flatter him with excessive praise, to which Alceste politely responds, “Monsieur, c’est trop d’honneur que vous me voulez faire [...] Avant que de nous lier, il faut nous mieux connaître.” By praising Alceste and requesting his friendship through a formal handshake (“Touchez là, s’il vous plait, Vous me la promettez, / Votre amitié?”), Oronte believes he is securing Alceste’s complaisance. He solicits this complaisance specifically in view of a sonnet that he has composed and proposes to read aloud: “Je viens, pour commencer entre nous ce beau nœud, / Vous montrer un sonnet que j’ai fait depuis peu, / Et savoir s’il est bon qu’au public je l’expose.” The practice of reading aloud one’s writings for an exclusive, intimate, and polite audience is clearly associated with salon culture, as are the “bonds” of “friendship” and the protocol of complaisance. Not wanting to appear discourteous, Alceste gently resists the pressure to enter into this spontaneous “salon.” He warns Oronte that his reception of the sonnet might be “un peu plus sincère en cela qu’il ne faut.” Oronte insists, confident that Alceste’s sincerity and complaisance will be in agreement.

Ever solicitous of Alceste’s indulgence, Oronte mentions that he only spent fifteen minutes writing his sonnet. As was pointed out in my third chapter, salon culture values promptness in literary creativity.<sup>28</sup> Alceste’s cool response, “Voyons, Monsieur;

---

<sup>28</sup> Recall Philonime’s remark in De Pure, *La Prétieuse*, 1:148-149: “Je n’examine point la Comedie par l’Auteur, encore moins par la peine de l’Auteur. Je tâche de percer & de penetrer le merite de la piece, l’esprit & la conduite de l’Auteur, & ne m’avise point si Corneille a esté plus long-temps à composer le Cid, que le Comediens à le reciter [...] Mais dans la conversation au contraire [...] [un] esprit prompt paye sur le champ; c’est de l’argent comptant, il n’y a point de remise.”

le temps ne fait rien à l'affaire," further reveals his reluctance to play the role of a salonnier. Wary of trying Alceste's patience, Oronte proceeds to the reading:

*L'espoir, il est vrai, nous soulage,  
Et nous berce un temps notre ennui;  
Mais, Philis, le triste avantage,  
Lorsque rien ne marche après lui!*

*Vous êtes de la complaisance;  
Mais vous en deviez moins avoir,  
Et ne vous pas mettre en dépense,  
Pour ne me donner que l'espoir.*

*S'il faut qu'une attente éternelle  
Pousse à bout l'ardeur de mon zèle,  
Le trépas sera mon recours.*

*Vous soins ne m'en peuvent distraire:  
Belle Philis, on désespère,  
Alors qu'on espère toujours.*

Philinte, who has been silent since Oronte's arrival, opens his mouth only to pay Oronte compliments both during and after the reading, according to salon custom. Notice that the speaker in the poem blames the beloved's complaisance for providing false hope. Oronte demonstrates a similar ambivalence toward the complaisance he has sought. Complaisance is only pleasing if it is based on sincerity. Thus, when Philinte declares as exaggeratedly as the salonnières in *Les Précieuses ridicules* and *Les Femmes savantes*, "Je n'ai jamais ouï de vers si bien tournés," Oronte dismisses this compliment as empty flattery: "Vous me flattez, et vous croyez peut-être..." Oronte is more interested in Alceste's reaction, for he knows Alceste to be rigorously sincere: "Mais, pour vous, vous savez quel est notre traité: / Parlez-moi, je vous prie, avec sincérité." This same "traité" entails the purchase of Alceste's complaisance through that offered by Oronte. He

believes that he can will his talent for poetry and make Alceste genuinely admire his sonnet.<sup>29</sup>

However, Alceste's complaisance cannot be purchased at the price of sincerity. He criticizes the poem, specifying that Oronte's "expressions ne sont point naturelles [...]" Ce style figuré, dont on fait vanité, / Sort du bon caractère et de la vérité: / Ce n'est que jeu de mots, qu'affectation<sup>30</sup> pure, / Et ce n'est point ainsi que parle la nature. / Le méchant goût du siècle, en cela, me fait peur." Oronte's style is thus said to conform with the "goût du siècle." Unlike the poems recited in Molière's other salons, composed by affected and/or incompetent poets, Oronte's sonnet does not feature language that is ungraceful or excessively mannered. The imagery (e.g., "*L'espoir [...] nous berce un temps notre ennui*") and use of rhetorical figures like irony ("*Vous êtes de la complaisance; / Mais vous en deviez moins avoir [...] / Pour ne me donner que l'espoir*") and antithesis ("*Belle Philis, on désespère, / Alors qu'on espère toujours*") are all integral to the gallant poetic style enjoyed by Molière's contemporaries. By finding fault with Oronte's sonnet, Alceste questions the taste of most salonniers, who enjoy what he considers to be "affectation pure."

---

<sup>29</sup> See Pierre Force, *Molière ou Le Prix des choses*, 134-135 for an Aristotelian interpretation of Oronte's strategy to assimilate "commutative justice" and "distributive justice." Through the former, one's merit is granted by others out of politeness; since politeness is a matter of choice and degree, this merit is subject to variation. Through the latter, one's merit is universally recognized as being inherent; because it is real and not socially conferred, it remains stable. See also Force, *Molière ou Le Prix des choses*, 138: "Pour que le jugement d'Alceste vaille quelque chose aux yeux d'Oronte, il faut qu'il soit sincère. Oronte est donc lui aussi, à bien des égards, la dupe de ses propres propos sur le mérite d'Alceste."

<sup>30</sup> Notice that in order for this hémistiche to contain the requisite six syllables, Alceste must pronounce a diérèse in the word "affectati-on." This very diérèse represents the quality of affectation. Recall the description of the pedant by the character Molière in *L'Impromptu de Versailles* (ii): "marquer cet air pédant qui se conserve parmi le commerce du beau monde, ce ton de voix sentencieux, et cette exactitude de prononciation qui appuie sur toutes les syllabes, et ne laisse échapper aucune lettre de la plus sévère orthographe."

Alceste's reception of Oronte's poem is not at all obliging. However, this reception does entail a performance, for Alceste immediately offers an example of poetry in which "la passion parle [...] toute pure":

*Si le Roi m'avait donné  
Paris sa grand'ville,  
Et qu'il me fallût quitter  
L'amour de ma mie,  
Je dirais au roi Henri:  
"Reprenez votre Paris:  
J'aime mieux ma mie, au gué!  
J'aime mieux ma mie."*

Alceste admits that the style is both outdated and "grossier," in comparison to Oronte's sonnet. However, the naivety of "*J'aime mieux ma mie, au gué!*" and the childish simplicity of "*Paris sa grand'ville*" are not necessarily evocative of an archaic literary style. Moreover, in subsequent versions of the text appearing in eighteenth-century vaudevilles, the reference in the fifth line to Henri IV is replaced by "Je lui dirois, grand merci".<sup>31</sup> Alceste prefers such simplicity and naivety over the "pompe fleurie" and the "faux brillants" of Oronte's sonnet. "Si le Roi m'avait donné" also serves to represent Alceste's misanthropy: just as the speaker refuses the king's offer of the entire city of Paris, Alceste refuses to conduct himself like a typical courtier currying favor from those in power and following trends set by sophisticated Parisians.

Though Alceste proposes to "say" these verses ("...que je m'en vais vous dire"), he refers to it as "une vieille chanson" and it is understood that he sings it.<sup>32</sup> Admittedly,

<sup>31</sup> See Patrice Coirault, *Formations de nos Chansons Folkloriques* (Paris: Scarabée, 1953-), 41.

<sup>32</sup> See Scudéry, "Conversation de la poésie française" in *De l'air galant et autres Conversations*, 288: "Toute la compagnie ayant donc prié Théodore de chanter, elle le fit, après qu'elle eut dit qu'elle ne chantait pas assez bien pour chanter un air fort passionné, et que la chanson qu'elle allait dire, n'était qu'une demi-déclaration d'amour fort galante [...] Toute la compagnie trouva cette chanson fort jolie, et d'un tour galant, et pria Théodore d'en vouloir chanter une plus passionnée avant que son maître fût venu [...]" Emphasis mine. The same use of verb "dire" is found in Maintenon's "Conversation sur la droiture" in *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*, 137: "l'on prend toutes sortes de précautions pour qu'il n'en entre

without the affective capacities of music, it would be difficult for Alceste to represent “la passion pure” through such a pittoresque verbal style. According to Georges Couton, editor of the definitive Pléiade edition of *Le Misanthrope*, the melody has simply disappeared.<sup>33</sup> To date, Patrice Coirault is the only musicologist to have shed precious light on the melody sung by Molière in the role of Alceste.<sup>34</sup> It seems that this melody was composed specifically for the premiere of *Le Misanthrope*, assembled from pieces of other popular melodies. Coirault cites a printed version of the song published in *Parodies du Nouveau Théâtre italien* (3 in-12, 1731).<sup>35</sup> His source presents the full melody, but only the first line of the text. Using the same melody, I propose the following musical setting of Alceste’s complete text in Figure 8:



Figure 8

point dans la maison [des chansons profanes], ni par les livres, ni par les écrits: y auroit-il de la droiture à s'en tenir au pied de la lettre, en ne *disant* aucune de ces chansons, mais de chanter celles que nous avons apprises dans le monde, et ne serait-ce pas aller tout de même contre la fin qu'on se propose?" Emphasis mine.

<sup>33</sup> Molière, *Œuvres complètes*, 2:1335: "Cette chanson n'a pas été retrouvée dans les recueils."

<sup>34</sup> Coirault, *Formations de nos Chansons Folkloriques*, 40-41, note (6). It should be noted that the vast research findings of Coirault (m. 1959) are still being studied by musicologists. See, for example, Georges Delarue, Marlène Belly, and Simone Wallon's recently edited compilation of his *Répertoire des chansons françaises de tradition orale* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1996-2007).

<sup>35</sup> Coirault maintains that the 1731 edition of the score is erroneous and prefers the 1738 edition. I disagree with his preference. The harmonic development is clearer in mm. 1, 13, and 14 of the 1731 edition than in the 1738 edition. Furthermore, the dotted figure in m. 10 of the 1731 edition instills the melody with a buoyancy that undoubtedly persists in performance, despite the later edition's heavier straight quarter notes. I have therefore chosen to transcribe the melody as it appears in 1731.



Though portions of the melody can be traced back to the 1640's, Coirault remarks that its "lourdeur" was "assez habituelle aux airs vulgaires du temps [i.e., of the second half of the seventeenth century] quand ils n'étaient pas des airs de danse parodiés ou ne provenaient pas de très habiles musiciens." I agree with Coirault that the melody is not particularly sophisticated, but I would not go so far as to qualify it as "heavy" vis-à-vis other airs enjoyed in then-contemporary salon society. Though *Alceste* claims to perform an "old" song, the original audience of *Le Misanthrope* did not necessarily perceive the words and music as such.

While Oronte's sonnet is representative of late seventeenth-century gallant poetry, salon taste was not necessarily limited to this style. It also delighted in the "jolis airs champêtres" idealizing the simple charm of shepherds and shepherdesses in love. A passage from the salon conversation in Le Cerf's *Comparaison* reveals this more "natural" taste in poetry and music:

Et toutes ces Brunettes, Monsieur, s'écria la Comtesse, tous ces jolis airs champêtres qu'on appelle des Brunettes, combien sont ils naturels! [...] Mon Dieu, Mr. le Chevalier, prouvés bien, je vous prie, qu'on doit compter pour de vraies beautés la douceur & la naïveté de ces petits airs, afin que je n'aye point honte d'aimer celui là autant que je fais. Aimés-le, Madame, dit-il, & même admirés-le, sans scrupule, aussi-bien que ces autres petits airs rustiques que nous dansons aux chansons avec les Dames, quand elles veulent bien nous le permettre, dans la gayeté & dans la liberté de la Campagne [...] Ces Branles, ces Brunettes sont doublement à estimer dans notre Musique. Et parce que cela n'est ni de la connoissance ni du génie des Italiens, & parce que les tons aimables gracieux, si finement proportionnés aux paroles, en sont d'un extrême prix. Car sur des paroles champêtres tout comme sur des paroles héroïques, en petit tout comme en grand, la justesse d'expression a son mérite. C'est la même nature représentée sous differens visages.<sup>36</sup>

In his *Comparaison*, Le Cerf celebrates the simplicity and purity of French vocal music, in contrast with the excessively ornate and virtuosic style of Italian singing.<sup>37</sup> The

---

<sup>36</sup> Le Cerf de La Viéville, *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise*, 32-33.

<sup>37</sup> In his remarkable article, "The *Honnête homme* as Music Critic," Don Fader studies the connection between evolving salon taste and French nationalism, as it is articulated in Le Cerf's work and in other seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources.

*brunettes* that the Comtesse is ashamed to enjoy typify this French style. The “rustic” appeal of the music and the modesty of the verbal style do not preclude a certain finesse without pretention and a “justesse d’expression” between music and text. Figure 9 presents my modern transcription of such a *brunette* from the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Notice the same musical and textual simplicity (particularly the first verse) as in Alceste’s song:

**"Dans notre village"**

from *Brunettes, ou petits airs tendres...* (Paris: Christophe Ballard, 1703)

Dans no - tre Vil - la - ge, Cha - cun vit con - tent: Les Berg - gers chant -

BASSE CONTINUE

6

tant, Après la fin de leur ou - vra - ge; Le res - te du jour, Vont fai - re l'a - mour.

**Figure 9**

Just as Le Cerf’s salonniers vindicate “la naïveté de ces petits airs,” praising them as “naturels” in their expression of human emotion,<sup>38</sup> Alceste vindicates his song in which “la passion parle [...] toute pure.” Though different from Oronte’s performance, Alceste’s performance is just as much in agreement with “le méchant goût du siècle,” despite his desire to part from it. One may even argue that Alceste’s preference for stylistic purity and natural expression is consistent with the ideals of “French classicism,”

<sup>38</sup> The second and third verses of “Dans notre village” are as follows: 2. Philis, je vous aime, / Vous n’en doutez pas: / Cependant, hélas! / Avec une froideur extrême, / Vous voyez l’ardeur, / Dont brûle mon cœur. 3. Philene, ta flamme / A paru trop tard: / Tircis, d’un regard, / S’est rendu maître de mon âme; / Je ne puis changer / Un si beau Berger.

distinct from ornate mannerism, on the one hand, and crude archaism, on the other.

Philinte's chuckle in reaction to Alceste's performance is more a strategic demonstration of his loyalty to Oronte, who is a powerful figure at Court, than proof that Alceste's "vieille chanson" is tasteless and/or obsolete. Perhaps it is a nervous chuckle signaling the end of this polite conversation, for the dialogue between Oronte and Alceste rapidly degenerates into an exchange of bitter insults, almost leading to physical violence.

Alceste thus uses his reception of Oronte's poem to perform, not in a manner that mirrors and flatters Oronte, but defiantly offering an alternative to "la pompe fleurie" of salon culture. Alceste declares to Philinte in the previous scene, "Je veux qu'on me distingue," a statement that may seem to suggest a certain arrogance. Does Alceste oppose himself to what others like in order to stand out, like the affected marquis in *La Critique*? Actually, Alceste's desire for distinction is a mechanism of self-preservation. He refuses to be reduced to a flattering mirror of others and defends his right to act and speak according to the dictates of his own heart: "Je veux qu'on soit sincère, et qu'en homme d'honneur / On ne lâche aucun mot qui ne parte du cœur." He thus offers a performance representing "un cœur vraiment épris," a sincere heart reflecting his sincere desire to communicate, to express himself openly. He refuses to flatter Oronte out of sheer gratitude, thus rejecting Philinte's advice from the previous scene: "Lorsqu'un homme vous vient embrasser avec joie, / Il faut bien le payer de la même monnaie, / Répondre, comme on peut, à ses empressements, / Et rendre offre pour offre, et serments pour serments." Alceste is incapable of such hypocritical complaisance, as he admits in (IV, i): "Je louerai, si l'on veut, son train et sa dépense, / Son adresse à cheval, aux armes, à la danse; / Mais pour louer ses vers, je suis son serviteur." Still, Alceste could have

somewhat reconciled complaisance and sincerity by offering a less scathing and explicit critique of Oronte's poem. He could have alluded vaguely and succinctly to minor faults in order to conclude more quickly a conversation he was loathe to begin. Oronte's performance, however, serves to "[lui] échauffer la bile," inciting Alceste not to "rompre en visière à tout le genre humain," as he claims in the previous scene, but to enter deeper into their dialogue, responding to Oronte's performance with his own. Alceste approaches conversation as a frank confrontation, and not a flattering reiteration, of ideas. This approach recalls Montaigne's "art de conferer":

Si je confere avec une ame forte et un roide jousteur, il me presse les flancs, me pique à gauche et à dextre; ses imaginations eslancent les miennes. La jalousie, la gloire, la contention me poussent et rehaussent au dessus de moy-mesmes. Et l'unisson est qualité du tout ennuyeuse en la conference [...] J'ayme une société et familiarité forte et virile [...] Elle n'est pas assez vigoureuse et genereuse, si elle n'est querelleuse, si elle est civilisée et artiste, si elle craint le hurt et a ses allures contreintes.<sup>39</sup>

Montaigne prefers a conversation that is "querelleuse" and not based on "l'unisson"; similarly, in (II, ii) Alceste is accused by Célimène of "aime[r] les gens pour leur faire querelle." Montaigne wants "une société et familiarité forte et virile" and "genereuse," according to the Nichomachean model; in the same vein, Alceste straightforwardly declares in (I, i): "Je veux que l'on soit homme." Montaigne admits that his urge to contradict his interlocutor is motivated by "la jalousie, la gloire, la contention"; likewise, Alceste's aggressive attitude toward Oronte is undoubtedly fueled by his rivalry with this other suitor of Célimène. Montaigne has no interest for conversation that is "civilisée et artiste"; Alceste responds to Oronte's complaisance and delicate artistry with unmitigated criticism and a singing performance that he himself calls "grossier." The similarities between these two approaches reveal that Alceste's conversational style, aspiring toward

---

<sup>39</sup> Montaigne, "De l'art de conferer" in *Les Essais*, 923, 924.

real communication, is singularly outdated: it is Montaigne's sixteenth-century "art de conferer." However, his singing performance is not outdated, Philinte's chuckle notwithstanding. Despite his desire to distinguish himself from his contemporaries, Alceste demonstrates through this performance what most salonniers would consider to be fine artistic taste. He may endeavor to avoid empty complaisance in this imposed salon, but the misanthrope cannot resist the temptation to entertain his interlocutors. His performance serves not as a pleasing mirror of Oronte's, according to polite salon etiquette, but as a true "vecteur de communication," to use Anne-Madeleine Goulet's expression, transforming passive reception into active dialogue.

Alceste loathes complaisance in salon interaction because he judges it to be generally hypocritical and dishonest, a vain mask that salonniers wear for each other. In the salons of *La Critique* and *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, Molière further undermines the quality of complaisance by turning it into the mask of malice. In both of these salons, one lady mocks another in her presence by impersonating her affected mannerisms. The performer ironically qualifies her impersonation as an admiring imitation in order to hoodwink her victim; meanwhile, any other salonniers and Molière's audience recognize her underlying malice, a practice known as persiflage.<sup>40</sup> Élise in *La Critique* feigns complaisance towards Climène in order to disguise her unflattering impersonation of her:

---

<sup>40</sup> Lilti, *Le monde des salons*, 280: "Dans la bonne société, le persiflage consistait à tenir un discours élogieux que tous, à l'exception de celui à qui il s'adressait, savait être ironique [...] Par principe, le persiflage s'adresse à quelqu'un qui ne comprend pas ce langage mondain, qui [...] prend la fausse monnaie pour de la bonne & se ridiculise d'autant plus qu'il s'enchant des louanges qu'on lui sert [...] Alors que [la raillerie] crée de la dissension au sein du collectif mondain, le persiflage soude le cercle par l'exclusion symbolique d'un intrus."

Élise: [...] j'entre dans tous vos sentiments et suis charmée de toutes les expressions qui sortent de votre bouche!

Climène: Hélas! Je parle sans affectation.

Élise: On le voit bien, Madame, et que tout est naturel en vous. Vos paroles, le ton de votre voix, vos regards, vos pas votre action et votre ajustement, ont je ne sais quel air de qualité, qui enchante les gens. Je vous étudie des yeux et des oreilles; et je suis si remplie de vous, que je tâche d'être votre singe, et de vous contrefaire en tout.

Climène: Vous vous moquez de moi, Madame.

Élise: Pardonnez-moi, Madame. Qui voudrait se moquer de vous?

Climène: Je ne suis pas un bon modèle, Madame.

Élise: Oh! que si, Madame!

Climène: Vous me flattez, Madame.

Élise: Point du tout, Madame.

Climène: Épargnez-moi, s'il vous plaît, Madame.

Élise: Je vous épargne aussi, Madame, et je ne dis point la moitié de ce que je pense, Madame.

Climène: Ah mon Dieu! Brisons là, de grâce. Vous me jetteriez dans une confusion épouvantable. (À *Uranie*.) Enfin, nous voilà deux contre vous, et l'opiniâtreté sied si mal aux personnes spirituelles.

There is no stage direction indicating that Élise is impersonating Climène during their dialogue. However, Élise's ironic compliment, "Vos paroles, le ton de votre voix, vos regards, vos pas votre action et votre ajustement, ont je ne sais quel air de qualité, qui enchante les gens," and her professed desire to become Climène's "singe," strongly suggest that Élise is aping Climène's gestures, facial expressions, pronunciation, and vocal inflection. One might wonder if Climène catches on to Élise's game. Her modest statements ("Vous vous moquez de moi, Madame," "Je ne suis pas un bon modèle, Madame," "Vous me flattez, Madame," "Épargnez-moi, s'il vous plaît, Madame") may imply a certain uneasiness, as if she realized that she was being mocked. However, Élise knows that Climène's affectation is associated with a smugness blinding her to the possibility of being ridiculed. The very arrogance and affectation that Élise satirizes guarantees that Climène will interpret her imitation as an act of flattery. Climène's final exclamation, "Ah mon Dieu! Brisons là, de grâce. Vous me jetteriez dans une confusion épouvantable" could very well betray a fleeting sentiment of doubt and embarrassment in front of a mirror that reflects her affectation. However, the *précieuse* quickly dismisses

such uncharacteristic feelings. Indeed, Climène does not recognize Élise's irony, for she finally turns to her hostess Uranie to say, "Enfin, nous voilà deux contre vous."

Uranie also finds Climène's affectation irritating. When she learns from her lackey that Climène has arrived, she tells Élise in (ii), "Ah! cousine, que cette visite m'embarrasse à l'heure qu'il est!" She then suffers the visit politely, but she does not demonstrate excessive complaisance toward Climène. Uranie even tells Climène in (iii) that she disagrees with her judgment of *L'École des femmes*: "Pour moi, je n'ai pas tant de complaisance; et, pour dire ma pensée, je tiens cette comédie une des plus plaisantes que l'auteur ait produites." Élise demonstrates more contempt for Climène's affectation, admitting to Uranie in (ii), "j'ai toujours eu pour elle une furieuse aversion." Élise's exaggerated kindness toward Climène, demonstrated through an imitation that attaches itself to her every movement and expression, is perfectly commensurate with her exaggerated aversion for this salonnière who refuses to recognize her own affectation ("Hélas!"<sup>41</sup> je parle sans affectation."). Élise's malice underlies what Dorante in (v) obliquely refers to as her "complaisance affectée."<sup>42</sup> Complaisance and malice are indistinguishable in Élise's performance of salon impersonation.

In *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, the *précieuse* being impersonated demonstrates more discernment than Climène. When the comtesse and her guest Julie prepare to take their seats in (I, ii), the comtesse, it will be recalled, is said to "*fai[re] des ceremonies pour s'asseoir*"; that is, she curtsies and waits for Julie to take her seat first. Out of politeness, Julie reciprocates by curtseying and similarly waiting. The ensuing exchange

---

<sup>41</sup> The exclamation "Hélas!" is a verbal tic common to Molière's affected characters. Recall Trissotin's "Hélas! c'est un enfant tout nouveau-né, Madame" in *Les Femmes savantes* (III, i).

<sup>42</sup> The adjective "affectée" in this context denotes both exaggeration and simulation.

of identical curtseys and enunciations is brought to a halt when the comtesse finally declares: “Je suis chez moi, Madame, nous sommes demeurées d’accord de cela. Me prenez-vous pour une provinciale, Madame?” to which Julie diffidently responds, “Dieu m’en garde, Madame!” The term “provinciale” is pronounced with repugnance by the comtesse, who prides herself in her Parisian-like sophistication. She thereby expresses her consternation at being impersonated by her guest. Fortunately, a blunder by her maid, who forgets to serve her cup on a saucer, immediately distracts the comtesse from Julie’s impertinence. Like Élise in *La Critique*, Julie demonstrates a “complaisance affectée” toward the comtesse during their conversation: “Je vous avoue, Madame, qu’il y a merveilleusement à profiter de tout ce que vous dites; c’est une école que votre conversation, et j’y viens tous les jours attraper quelque chose.” Élise ironically admits her malice to Climène who does not understand what she means: “Je vous épargne aussi, Madame, et je ne dis point la moitié de ce que je pense, Madame.” Julie makes a similar confession through her compliment, which the comtesse’s pride and affectation prevent her from understanding. In the audacious performances by Julie and Élise, malicious impersonation impersonates flattering imitation. Excessive, hypocritical flattery in these performances serves to mask their aversion for their affected interlocutors and, paradoxically, to transform this secret aversion into an open insult with impunity. In his “Lettre à d’Alembert,” Jean-Jacques Rousseau famously praises Alceste’s unabashed misanthropy for implicitly favoring authenticity in social interaction. Vis-à-vis Alceste, therefore, Julie and Élise are oppositional figures: their apparently well-meaning imitations surreptitiously serve as vehicles of malice.



Thus, Molière uses the representation of performances by salonniers, namely poetic recitation, singing, and impersonation, to satirize the quality of complaisance. Complaisance in artistic reception is revealed to be a vain performance through which the listener emulates the artist. Alceste's reception of Oronte's poem in *Le Misanthrope* is highly unusual, for it entails a salon performance that is neither imitative nor complaisant, but openly conflictual. In other salons, the semblance of complaisance is dishonestly used to disguise social aggression. By turning the quality of complaisance on its head, Molière seems to denounce a fundamental ideal of salon sociability. Or rather, he uses his salonniers' performances within the performance of his play, this *mise en abyme*, to place the salon ideal of complaisance at a playfully ironic distance. In this manner, Molière can stay within the limits of what he calls "la satire honnête et permise."

### ***Conclusion: Salon and Stage Relativized***

As this chapter has demonstrated, Molière represents salon culture as a formally distinct superperformance within his plays. This superperformance features different types of social acting: the "natural" acting of *les honnêtes gens*, the affected acting of the marquis, *précieuse*, and pedant character types, and various artistic performances (e.g., poetic recitation, singing) associated with the performance of complaisance. Molière is not using satire to instigate reform in salon culture. Rather, he uses the representation of the salon as a play within his plays to distance his spectators from this culture. They can thus appreciate the humor in its numerous paradoxes: the quest for naturalness within the confines of formality, the sensual pleasure procured from intellectual contemplation, the desire to reconcile sincere communication with obliging reiteration, the use of politeness for malicious purposes.

At the same time, I do not believe that Molière's salons serve only as "miroirs publics" reflecting social reality, to use Uranie's expression in *La Critique*. These superperformed salons are also mirroring theatrical practice. The preceding chapters of my study have shown that performance, both artistic and social, was problematic in the salon. When they performed, salonniers risked appearing affected (chapter 1), immodest and malicious (chapter 2), and duplicitous (chapter 3). These qualities were discouraged in part because they were commonly attributed to marginalized stage performers. Socially speaking, most of these artists ceased to exist outside of their performances.<sup>43</sup> However, by attributing the same stereotypical vices to the salonnier characters represented by his actors, Molière seems to suggest that the distance separating salonnier from stage performer is not as great as most salonniers would presume. Without pushing this identification too far, Molière uses his theatrical representation of the salon to ironize and relativize the superiority and disdain of salonniers vis-à-vis stage performers.

Several fictional salonniers in Molière's theater demonstrate the unfavorable qualities enumerated above. Affectation is what defines the marquis, the *précieuse*, and the pedant. The *précieuses* in *Les Femmes savantes* are guilty of immodesty during their breathlessly enthusiastic – one might even say orgasmic – reception of a poetic recitation. Malice and complaisance are portrayed as two sides of the same coin in *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas* and *La Critique*. Duplicity does not preclude the quality of *honnêteté*, as Dorante demonstrates in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*.

---

<sup>43</sup> Goulet, *Poésie, musique et sociabilité au XVIIe siècle*, 594: According to Jean Regnault de Segrais, "'M. le comte de Fiesque, qui avait une très belle voix et qui faisait souvent sa partie avec [les chanteurs], me disait que hors de leur chant, c'étaient de sottes gens (...) il faisait d'eux comme des instruments de musique qu'on met dans l'étui, le concert fini [...] il ne fallait les voir que quand on en avait besoin.'" Similarly, according to Sabine Chaouche, French society of the seventeenth century was not ready to recognize "l'humanité et l'individualité" of stage actors. See Chaouche, *La philosophie de l'Acteur*, 34-35.

It is not difficult to establish that stage performers, and Molière's actors in particular, were commonly accused of the same vices. As discussed in my third chapter, duplicity was integral to the very profession of the stage actor during the seventeenth century. As Antoine Gombault, chevalier de Méré maintains, "un Comedien, qui pour représenter une passion violente, seroit effectivement touché, feroit une aussi grande faute, qu'un Peintre qui mettrait des diamants ou des perles dans ses tableaux, au lieu de les y peindre."<sup>44</sup> All stage actors were thought to wear some sort of mask.

Molière's art of satirizing his contemporaries, instead of representing timeless stock characters, was often attributed by his detractors to his malicious personality. In his prefaces to *Les Précieuses ridicules* and *Le Tartuffe*, Molière is obliged to justify his satire as "honnête et permise," insisting that it targets "les ridicules" and "les hypocrites" instead of "les véritables précieuses" and "de véritables gens de bien." He claims that those who might have taken offense "n'ont point entendu raillerie" and he defends his "hardiesse de jouer leurs grimaces." In between the lines, Molière is defending himself from the accusation of malicious mockery in the manner of a *farceur* or inimical *buffone*. Not surprisingly, the accusation of malice also came from Molière's theatrical rivals. Following *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, in which Molière impersonates several actors from the Hôtel de Bourgogne, Donneau de Visé, a playwright at that theater, retaliates by composing his *Réponse de à l'Impromptu de Versailles*. In this play, the *honnête homme* Alcipe says of Molière, "Je ne crois pas que cette vengeance sente l'honnête homme, et elle marque plus d'aigreur que d'esprit."<sup>45</sup> Molière was thus accused of malice by many

---

<sup>44</sup> Méré, "Discours VI: Suite du Commerce du Monde," 3:158.

<sup>45</sup> *L'Impromptu de Versailles* is written in retaliation against the Hôtel de Bourgogne's *Le Portrait d'un peintre* by Edmé Boursault, which is a parody of *La Critique* by Molière. It seems that the Bourguignons'

of his contemporaries, leading to multiple controversies in the course of his career. I agree with Patrick Dandrey's assessment that Molière's satires were not necessarily intended to effect change in salon society, according to the formula *castigat ridendo mores*.<sup>46</sup> Rather, Molière was an amused observer of his contemporaries' eccentricities which, as the character Molière in *L'Impromptu de Versailles* (iv) admits, provided him with precious material for his artistic output. Whether he derived malicious pleasure or pleasurable instruction from these observations, he knew how to transform them into entertainment.

Female immodesty was infamously associated with Molière during the controversy surrounding *L'École des femmes* (II, v). The character Agnès ingenuously admits to her guardian Arnolphe that a young suitor has taken her ribbon. Molière instills this confession with sexual ambiguity by making Agnès hesitate a long time before she pronounces the word "ruban." Her hesitation incites Arnolphe and the audience to infer in the meantime that the suitor has actually taken her virginity. This effect is considered scandalous by certain contemporaries of Molière, much more so than other sexual insinuations in *L'École des femmes*,<sup>47</sup> precisely because it is performed by a young female actress. The vice of immodesty is attributed not only to the fictional character

---

parody was more enthusiastically received than Molière's original play, explaining the "bitterness" of his attack in *L'Impromptu de Versailles*.

<sup>46</sup> Dandrey, *Molière ou L'esthétique du ridicule*, 32: "A l'idéal illusoire de la sanction par la satire ad hominem, la comédie de Molière préfère la réalité d'une méditation intime et joyeuse sur ce peu que nous sommes, comparé à ce tout que nous croyons être [...] Molière se montre moraliste comme on sait l'être en son temps: plus préoccupé de constater que de reprouver et d'amender, plus soucieux de pénétrer les replis et de mettre au jour les ressorts de l'âme humaine que de prétendre l'améliorer."

<sup>47</sup> In (II, iv), for example, Arnolphe's servant Alain explains that "la femme est en effet le potage de l'homme; / Et quand un homme voit d'autres hommes parfois / Qui veulent dans sa soupe aller tremper leurs doigts..."

Agnès, but to the actress portraying her. As the comte exclaims in the third scene of *Le Portrait d'un peintre* by Edmé Boursault, “Quand je vis que l’Actrice y faisoit une pose, / Je crûs que l’innocente alloit dire autre chose. / Et le ruban, ma foi, je ne l’attendois pas.” (Emphasis mine.) Georges Couton cites a fascinating testimony by Le Verrier, contemporary of Molière, with respect to Agnès’s ambiguous ribbon and similar sexual intimations in *Les Contes* by Jean de La Fontaine: “Pourquoi l’un et l’autre [Molière and La Fontaine] n’ont-ils gardé dans leurs écrits la modestie qu’ils avaient dans leur conversation?”<sup>48</sup> If the salonnier Molière supposedly stayed within the boundaries of modesty, he made his actresses occasionally break those boundaries... even when they were representing salonnières (i.e., Philaminte, Bélise, and Armande’s “orgasmic” poetic reception in *Les Femmes savantes*).

The association between affectation and Molière’s own performance art may surprise modern readers. After all, did not Molière use *L’Impromptu de Versailles* to mock the affected acting of the Bourguignons and to distinguish it from his “natural” style? Many historians have interpreted Molière’s impersonations as a more or less faithful representation of those tragedians.<sup>49</sup> However, if one looks at the theatrical context of *L’Impromptu de Versailles*, one realizes that Molière’s satire of other actors’ affectation demands some qualification. First, it is difficult to take seriously his claim in

---

<sup>48</sup> See Couton’s note with reference to p. 573 in Molière, *Œuvres complètes*, 1273. Samuel Chappuzeau similarly refers to the tasteful elegance of Molière’s conversation. See Chappuzeau, *Le théâtre français*, 198: “[Il] estoit [...] d’une conversation si douce & si aisée, que les premiers de la Court & de la ville estoient ravis de l’entretenir.”

<sup>49</sup> In *L’Art du comédien*, Sabine Chaouche analyzes Molière’s critique of the Bourguignons in *L’Impromptu de Versailles*. Her purpose is to clearly identify the faults denounced by Molière, and to use these faults to deduce the theatrical standards and conventions in effect during that period. She does not consider the possibility that Molière’s unflattering portrayal of the Bourguignons in *L’Impromptu de Versailles* was more motivated and strategic than descriptive.

*L'Impromptu de Versailles* to declaim tragedy more “naturally” than the Bourguignons, for Molière was a famously lousy tragedian.<sup>50</sup> When he demonstrated passages from Corneille’s *Nicomède* and *Horace* in this play, did his performance really surpass that of the Bourguignons, who were generally applauded for their art of tragic acting? Secondly, one wonders if the actors whom Molière impersonated were indeed affected, or if he only portrayed his enemies in this manner. Montfleury, whom Molière accuses of too much “emphase” and an unrelenting “ton de démoniaque” is described by Mme Paul Poisson in more flattering terms: “Il était plein de sentiments pathétiques et quelquefois jusqu’à faire perdre la respiration aux spectateurs.”<sup>51</sup> If Montfleury had really been that affected, his spectators would not have been moved in the manner just described. Relations between Montfleury and Molière were openly hostile, which undoubtedly motivated Molière’s choice of satire. Mme Paul Poisson’s judgment does not necessarily override that of Molière, but the discrepancy between them relativizes Molière’s satire. Moreover, as George Couton notes, “On a remarqué que Molière ne s’en est pas pris à Floridor, dont Tallemant estime pourtant qu’il n’était pas un très grand acteur. Mais sans doute Floridor avait-il été plus modéré à son égard que les autres Bourguignons.”<sup>52</sup> If he had so desired, Molière could have ridiculed Floridor or any actor for that matter; as the character

---

<sup>50</sup> Molière realized early in his career that he was not fit for tragic acting. Jean Léonor Le Gallois de Grimarest acknowledges Molière’s inability to perform tragedy in *La vie de Molière* (1692) (Paris: I. Liseux, 1877), 113: “Il est vrai que Molière n’étoit bon que pour représenter le Comique; il ne pouvoit entrer dans le sérieux, et plusieurs personnes assurent qu’ayant voulu le tenter, il réussit si mal la première fois qu’il parut sur le théâtre, qu’on ne le laissa pas achever.” See also Tallemant des Réaux, *Historiettes*, 2:778: “ce n’est pas un merveilleux acteur, si ce n’est pour le ridicule.”

<sup>51</sup> Couton’s citation in Molière, *Œuvres complètes*, 1299.

<sup>52</sup> Molière, *Œuvres complètes*, 1300. Tallemant des Réaux’s description of Floridor reads as follows: “C’est un médiocre comédien, quoi que le monde en veuille dire; il est toujours pâle [...] ainsi point de changement de visage.” See Tallemant des Réaux, *Historiettes*, 2:777.

Molière admits in *L'Impromptu de Versailles* (i), “Mon Dieu, il n’y en a point qu’on ne pût attraper par quelque endroit, si je les avais bien étudiés.” His choice of satire thus seems to have been motivated more by political, strategic considerations than by any perceived affectation among those actors. Finally, and this point is most relevant to my current argument, if Molière points fingers at the Bourguignons for their supposed affectation, he is not exempt from the same accusation! Jean Léonor Le Gallois de Grimarest, an openly sympathetic biographer of Molière, is forced to admit in *La vie de Molière* that “les gens délicats l’accusent d’être un peu grimacier. Mais si ces personnes-là le lui avoient reproché à lui-même, je ne sais s’il n’auroit pas eu raison de leur répondre que le commun du Public aime les charges, et que le jeu délicat ne l’affecte point.” In *L'Impromptu de l'Hôtel de Condé* by Montfleury fils, the character Alcidon in (iii) similarly accuses Molière of exaggerated grimacing: “Mais aux grimaces près, on peut mieux réciter.”<sup>53</sup> Thus Molière the actor seems to have been *grimacier*. This tendency did not necessarily reflect his “hardiesse de jouer [les] grimaces” of others, despite his claim in the preface to *Tartuffe* and despite Mlle Béjart’s insistence in *L'Impromptu de Versailles* that a comic actor only appears ridiculous when representing a ridiculous character.<sup>54</sup> In the performance of his comedies, Molière’s grimaces were his own, and they were regarded by certain contemporaries as a sign of affectation.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Molière, *Œuvres complètes*, Appendice III, 1120.

<sup>54</sup> *L'Impromptu de Versailles* (i): “Car vouloir contrefaire un comédien dans un rôle comique, ce n’est pas le peindre lui-même, c’est peindre d’après lui les personnages qu’il représente, et se servir des mêmes traits et des mêmes couleurs qu’il est obligé d’employer aux différents tableaux des caractères ridicules qu’il imite d’après nature.

<sup>55</sup> Bacilly, “Discours qui sert de réponse à la Critique de l’Art de chanter,” 11: “Pour moi je tiens que ce n’est pas avoir ajouté au Chant que cette grande affectation qui est souvent accompagnée de grimace.” See also Célimène’s portrait of the affected Timante in *Le Misanthrope* (II, iv): “Tout ce qu’il vous débite en grimaces abonde; / À force de façons, il assomme le monde.”

What appears grossly affected to some may be interpreted by others, such as Grimarest, as tastefully emphatic (“le commun du Public aime les charges”). Molière and his rivals at the hôtel de Bourgogne could each qualify his or her acting style as “naturally” emphatic. However, the fact that accusations were flying between the two theaters suggests that all of these actors, including Molière himself, were occasionally guilty of affectation.

Thus Molière and/or his actors, whose very profession was synonymous with duplicity, were specifically accused by their contemporaries of vices generally attributed to stage performers: malice, immodesty, and affectation. By attributing these same vices to the salonniers represented by his actors, Molière seems to lessen the gap between salonnier and stage actor. I would not go so far as to interpret this comparison as a vindication of an underappreciated, marginalized profession, on the one hand, or a defamation of salon sociability, on the other. Rather, Molière represents salonniers as social performers who cannot completely dissociate themselves, try as they may, from theatrical performers. His salons superimpose stage performance and social performance, dramatic enactment and the enactment of civility. His theater mirrors social reality which mirrors his theater, resulting in the *mise en abyme* that is the superperformance of salon conversation.



## Conclusion

One might have expected salonniers to approach performance delicately and to mitigate its strong affects in order to maintain an “air galant.” On the contrary, salonniers were free to transform into characters far from the aristocratic ideal, to embody strong emotions, to reveal their true nature behind the social mask, and to genuinely enjoy themselves in the process. These liberties did not imply that salonniers were abandoning their sense of self-control. Self-control did not always necessitate self-restraint in this culture. Still, salonniers distinguished their manner of performing from that of professionals in order to demonstrate the social and moral differences between them. Performing “en personne de condition” during *le Grand Siècle* meant striking a balance between the freedom to play, deride, emote, and be spontaneous through art, including the art of conversation, and the social constraints ensuring one’s image of dignity, generosity, virtue, and refinement. Unlike what Staël suggests, I believe that “la gaité française” of the seventeenth century was not always “piquante;” it was possible to let down one’s guard in social and artistic performance. Perhaps therein lies the grandeur of this aristocracy.

It would be interesting to further investigate the interaction in seventeenth-century salons between amateur salonniers and professional performers, their respective modes of behavior and self-expression, and the qualities of their art. Eighteenth-century salons often featured dramatic productions in which amateur actors and professional actors performed side by side (e.g., at the residence of the duchesse de Maine in Sceaux). Seventeenth-century sources attest to professional performances in salons, whether

musical or dramatic, but the artistic and social implications and consequences of these performances and interactions have yet to be studied.

In my study of seventeenth-century salon conversation and performance, I have concentrated primarily on aesthetic and moral values in aristocratic culture and their repercussions on stage performance. Clearly, the social and artistic phenomenon of the salon can also be approached from a political perspective. As was first mentioned in my “Introduction,” salon culture was riddled with political tensions between interlocutors, tensions that continued to be felt through the performance of politesse and complaisance. In the aftermath of the Fronde (1648-1653), salons constituted discreet forums for disgruntled nobles who had opposed the crown, especially the Jansenist circles of the duchesse de Longueville and the marquise de Sablé.<sup>1</sup> It is certain that artistic performances in these salons<sup>2</sup> contributed to the political expression and interplay between interlocutors, just as the *ballet de cour* performed by members of the nobility often served as a vehicle of political propaganda or resistance. It would therefore be interesting to explore the political strategies underlying salon performance practices in the seventeenth century.

Finally, I have concentrated on dramatic representations of salon culture by the amateur playwright Maintenon and the professional playwright and actor Molière

---

<sup>1</sup> Craveri, *La civiltà della conversazione*, 151: “Se Port-Royal si serviva di lei per conquistare la simpatia della società mondana, lei si serviva di Port-Royal in chiave politica, per indebolire Mazzarino, colpevole di non aver mostrato abbastanza considerazione per suo marito.”

<sup>2</sup> Craveri, *La civiltà della conversazione*, 169: “Con la conversione al giansenismo, Madame de Sablé rinunciava alle feste e ai divertimenti, non ai piaceri della società. La marchesa avrebbe continuato a ricevere a casa sua amici e conoscenti e, negli anni che seguirono al fallimento della Fronde, il suo salotto sarebbe diventato uno dei luoghi d’incontro più creativi della vita culturale e mondana francese.” It was in Sablé’s salon at Port-Royal that she and La Rochefoucauld developed the *maxime* as both literary genre and verbal salon game.

because they differently address the issues of naturalness and affectation or artifice, liberty and constraint, theatricality and subtlety in performance, both artistic and social, amateur and professional. Maintenon, an exemplary *honnête femme*, was nonetheless circumspect with regard to aristocratic sociability. At the same time, she valued dramatic enactment for its pedagogical, stylistic, and aesthetic value, and yet she feared the implications of turning her well-bred students into actresses. This unique double ambivalence manifested itself in the content and practice of her *Conversations*. The choice of Molière needs little justification: he was the first theatrical artist to represent salon interaction on the professional stage, and to clearly distinguish this type of performance from the rest of his theater. Molière's sense of irony brings to the forefront the problematic relationship between aristocratic performance and professional performance. However, there is no reason to limit the study of salon culture in dramatic representation to these works. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries offer many such representations. One may be interested in examining other plays including *Le Cercle des femmes* by Samuel Chappuzeau and *L'Esté des coquettes* by Dancourt, as well as the eighteenth-century operas *Les Deux suivantes* by Charles-François Pannard and *Les Talens à la mode* by Louis de Boissy.

In closing, my study of seventeenth-century French salon culture has served to investigate the paradoxical relationship between the qualities of naturalness and affectation, performance and nonperformance, amateur and professional art, sociability and artistic performance. These concepts inform more than they oppose each other and must therefore be allowed to converse.

## Bibliography: Primary Sources

### 16<sup>th</sup>-century texts

Castiglione, Baldassare. *Le parfait courtisan du comte Baltasar Castillonois / Es deux langues respondans par deux colonnes, l'une à l'autre, pour ceux qui veulent avoir l'intelligence de l'une d'icelles. De la traduction de Gabriel Chapuis, Tourangeau.* Paris: N. Bonfons, 1585.

Du Bellay, Joachim. "Le poète courtisan." In *La nouvelle maniere de faire son profit des lettres.* Poitiers: 1559.

Montaigne, Michel de. "De l'oisiveté" (I, viii), "Du parler prompt ou tardif" (I, x), "De l'institution des enfans" (I, xxvi), "De trois commerces" (III, iii), "De l'art de conferer" (III, viii). In *Les Essais.* Villey-Saulnier, ed. Paris: P.U.F., 2004.

Ronsard, Pierre de. "Au Lecteur," *La Franciade* (1572). In *Œuvres complètes de P. de Ronsard.* Paris: P. Jannet, 1857-1867.

### 17<sup>th</sup>-century texts

Bacilly, Bénigne de. "Discours qui sert de réponse à la Critique de l'Art de chanter." In *L'Art de bien chanter de M. de Bacilly. Augmenté d'un Discours qui sert de Réponse à la Critique de ce Traité, et d'une plus ample instruction pour ceux qui aspirent à la perfection de cet Art. Ouvrage tres-utile, non seulement pour le Chant, mais même pour la Declamation* (1679). Geneva: Minkoff Reprint, 1972.

-----, *Remarques curieuses sur l'art de bien chanter, et particulièrement pour ce qui regarde le chant françois.* Paris: Ballard, 1668.

Bary, René. *L'Esprit curieux, ou Les Conversations galantes.* Amsterdam: Jacques Le jeune, 1681.

-----, *L'Esprit de cour, ou Les conversations galantes, divisées en 100 dialogues.* Brussels: B. Vivien, 1664.

Boileau, Nicolas. *Art poétique* (1673). Paris: GF Flammarion, 1969.

Boursault, Edmé. *Portrait d'un Peintre.* In *Théâtre* (1663). Hiacinthe Boursault, ed. Paris: 1725.

Chapelain, *De la lecture des vieux romans* (1647). Paris: A. Aubry, 1870.

-----, "Lettre CCXXXV. à M. le Marquis de Montauzier" (1638). In *Lettres de Jean Chapelain, de l'Académie française / publiées par Ph. Tamizey de Larroque.* Paris: Impr. nationale, 1968.

- Chappuzeau, Samuel. *Le théâtre françois, divisé en trois livres, où il est traité : I. de l'Usage de la comédie; II. des Auteurs qui soutiennent le théâtre; III. de la Conduite des comédiens*. Lyon: M. Mayer, 1674.
- Corneille, Pierre. *Mélite* (1633). In *Œuvres complètes*. Georges Couton, ed. Paris: Gallimard, 1987.
- , *Les Trois Discours sur le poème dramatique* (1660). In *Œuvres complètes*. Georges Couton, ed. Paris: Gallimard, 1987.
- Courtin, Antoine de. *Nouveau Traité de la civilité qui se pratique en France parmi les honnestes gens*. Paris: H. Josset, 1671.
- Dancourt. *L'Esté des coquettes, comédie*. Paris: Ve L. Gontier, 1691.
- Donneau de Visé, Jean. *Le Mercure galant*. 6 vols. Paris: T. Girard, 1672-1674, 1678.
- Du Bosc, Jacques (Le P.). *L'Honneste femme*. Paris: A. Courbé, 1636.
- Faret, Nicolas. *L'Honneste homme ou, L'art de plaire à la cour* (1630). Paris: P.U.F., 1925.
- Gracián, Baltasar. *L'Homme de cour* (1637). Trad. le Sieur Amelot de la Houssaie. Paris: La Veuve-Martin, & Jean Boudot, 1684.
- Grenaille, François de, sieur de Chatounières. *L'honnête fille : où dans le premier livre il est traité de l'esprit des filles* (1639-1640). Alain Vizier, ed. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2003.
- Guez de Balzac, Jean-Louis. *Les Entretiens*. (1657) B. Beugnot, ed. Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1972.
- , "Suite d'un entretien de vive voix, ou de la conversation des Romains," "Réponse à deux questions, ou du caractère et de l'instruction de la comédie," and "Mécénas, à Mme la marquise de Rambouillet." In *Œuvres diverses* (1644). Roger Zuber, ed. Paris: Honoré Champion, 1995.
- Hindret, Jean. *L'art de bien prononcer et de bien parler la langue françoise* (1687). Paris: France-expansion, 1973.
- , *L'art de prononcer parfaitement la langue françoise*. 2 vols. Paris: chez Laurent d'Houry, 1696.
- La Bruyère, Jean de. *Les Caractères de Théophraste, traduits du grec avec Les Caractères ou Les Mœurs de ce siècle* (1694). Paris: Flammarion, 1965.
- La Mesnardière, Hippolyte Jules Pilet de. *La poétique* (1639). Paris: France-expansion, 1973.

- La Mothe Le Vayer, François de. "Du Bon et du mauvais usage des récitations." In *Opusculs ou petitz traictez* (IV). Paris: A. de Sommaville, 1643.
- Lamy, Bernard. *L'art de parler*. Paris: André Pralard, 1678.
- Maintenon, Françoise d'Aubigné, marquise de. *Extraits de ses lettres, avis, entretiens, conversations et proverbes sur l'éducation, précédés d'une introduction par Oct. Gréard*. Paris: Hachette, 1886.
- , *Lettres historiques et édifiantes adressées aux dames de Saint-Louis*. Paris: Charpentier, 1856.
- , *Les loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*. London, Paris: Duchesne, 1757.
- Méré, Antoine Gombault, chevalier de. *Lettres de M. le chevalier de Méré*. Paris: la Compagnie des libraires, 1689.
- , *Œuvres complètes du chevalier de Méré*. 3 vols. Charles-H. Boudhors, ed. Paris: Fernand Roches, 1930.
- Mersenne, Marin. *Harmonie universelle contenant la théorie et la pratique de la musique* (1636). vol. 2, livre 1. Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1986.
- Millet, Jean. *La Belle méthode ou l'Art de bien chanter* (1666). New York: Da Capo Press, 1973.
- Molière, J.-B. P. de. *Œuvres complètes*. 2 vols. Georges Couton, ed. Paris: Gallimard, 1971.
- Morvan de Bellegarde, Jean-Baptiste. *Modèles de conversations pour les personnes polies*. Paris : J. Guignard, 1697.
- Nicole, Pierre. *Traité de la Comédie* (1667). Georges Couton, ed. Paris: "Les Belles Lettres," 1961.
- Nivers, Guillaume Gabriel. *Méthode facile pour apprendre à chanter la musique, par un masitre célèbre de Paris*. Paris : R. Ballard, 1666.
- Ortigue de Vaumorière, Pierre. *L'art de plaire dans la conversation*. Paris: Jean Guignard, 1688.
- Perrin, Pierre. *Recueil de poésies de M. Perrin, reveuës par l'auteur*. Paris: J. Henault, 1655.
- Pure, Michel de. *La Prétieuse, ou Le mystère des ruelles*. 4 Parties. Paris: G. de Luyne, 1656-1658.
- Saint François de Sales. *Introduction à la vie dévote, Troisième Partie* (1610). In *Œuvres*. André Ravier, Roger Devos, eds. Paris: Gallimard, 1986.

- Saint-Evremond, Charles de Marguetel de Saint-Denis, Seigneur de. "Sur les opéra." In *Œuvres meslées* (1684). vol. 11. Cambridge, Mass.: Omnisys, 1990, 77-119; *Œuvres de M. de Saint-Évremond, avec la vie de l'auteur par M. Des Maizeaux*. vol. 4. s. l., 1753, 39-53.
- Sarasin, François. "S'il faut qu'un jeune homme soit amoureux / Dialogue" (1647). In *Œuvres de J.-Fr. Sarasin*. Paul Festugière, ed. Paris: Librairie Ancienne Édouard Champion, 1926.
- Scudéry, Madeleine de. *Chroniques du samedi, suivies de pièces diverses, 1653-1654*. Alain Niderst, Delphine Denis, Myriam Maître, eds. Paris: H. Champion, 2002.
- *Conversations morales*. 2 vols. Paris: sur le quay des Augustins, à la descente du Pont-neuf, à l'image Saint-Louis, 1686.
- *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets, dédiées au Roy*, 2 vols. Paris: C. Barbin, 1684.
- *Conversations sur divers sujets*. 2 vols. Paris: Claude Barbin, au Palais, sur le Perron de la Sainte Chapelle, 1680.
- "De l'air galant" et autres *Conversations (1653-1684) / Pour une étude de l'archive galante*. Delphine Denis, ed. Paris: Honoré Champion, 1998.
- "Les Jeux servant de preface à *Mathilde*." In *Mathilde* (1667). Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1979.
- *Nouvelles conversations de morale*. Paris : Vve de S. Mabre-Cramoisy, 1688.
- Sept traités sur le jeu du comédien et autres textes : de l'action oratoire à l'art dramatique 1657-1750*. Paris: H. Champion, 2001.
- Sévigné, Marie de Rabutin-Chantal. *Correspondance T. 1-3, 1675-1680*. Paris: Gallimard, 1974.
- Sorel, Charles. *Le Berger extravagant, où, parmi des fantaisies amoureuses, on void les impertinences des romans et de la poésie* (1627). Geneva: Slatkine, 1972.
- *La Comédie des Chansons*. Paris: Chez Toussaint Quinet, 1640.
- *De la connoissance des bons livres ou Examen de plusieurs auteurs*. Amsterdam: H. et T. Boom, 1672.
- *La Maison des Jeux* (1642). Geneva: Slatkine, 1977.
- *Nouveau recueil des pieces les plus agreables de ce temps, ensuite des jeux de l'Inconnû et de la Maison des Jeux*. Paris: N. de Sercy, 1644.
- *Œuvres diverses ou Discours meslez* (1663). Cambridge (Mass.): Omnisys, 1990.

----- . *Les Récréations galantes* (1672). Cambridge (Mass.): Omnisys, 1990.

Tallemant des Réaux, Gédéon. *Historiettes*. 2 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1980.

Thiers, Jean-Baptiste. *Traité des jeux et des divertissements, qui peuvent être permis ou qui doivent être défendus aux chrétiens selon les règles de l'Église et le sentiment des Pères*. Paris: A. Dezallier, 1686.

Vaugelas, Claude Favre de. *Remarques sur la langue françoise* (1647). Paris: Librairie de J. Baudry, 1880.

Voiture, Vincent. *Lettres*. In *Œuvres de Voiture*. vol. 1. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1967.

### 18<sup>th</sup>-century texts

“Amarillis, je renonce à vos charmes.” In *Brunettes, ou Petits airs tendres, avec les doubles et la basse-continue, mêlés de chansons à danser*, vol. 3. Paris: Christophe Ballard, 1711, 108-109.

Du Bos, Jean-Baptiste. *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719). Paris: J. Mariette, 1733.

Grimarest, Jean Léonor Le Gallois de. *Traité du récitatif dans la lecture, dans l'action publique, dans la déclamation, et dans le chant* (1707). Paris: France-expansion, 1973.

Le Cerf de La Viéville, Jean-Louis. *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise*. Bruxelles: F. Foppens, 1704.

Léris, Antoine. *Dictionnaire portative historique et littéraire des théâtres* (1763). Geneva: Slatkine, 1970.



## Bibliography: Secondary Sources

- Albert, Mechthild. "L'Éloquence du corps / Conversation et sémiotique corporelle au siècle classique." *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* (1989), 39: 156-179.
- Amonoo, Reginald Fraser. "Les rapports entre les salons et la tragédie au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Pierre Corneille et Jean Racine devant le public des salons." In *Vie des salons et activités littéraires de Marguerite de Valois à Madame de Staël, actes du colloque international de Nancy, 6-8 octobre 1999*. Roger Marchal, ed. Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 2001, 285-292.
- Auld, Louis. *The Lyric Art of Pierre Perrin, Founder of French Opera*. 3 vols. Henryville, PA: Institute of Mediaeval Music, 1986.
- Austin, J. L. *How to do things with words / The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1995*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.
- Bauman, Richard. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1977.
- Bayard, Pierre. *Comment parler des livres que l'on n'a pas lus?* Paris: les Éditions de Minuit, 2006.
- Beasley, Faith. *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France / Mastering Memory*. Vermont: Ashgate, 2006.
- Berrada, Tarek. "Les lieux de l'air de cour." In *Poésie, musique et société: l'air de cour en France au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Georgie Durosoir, ed. Liège: Mardaga, 2006, 67-79.
- Beugnot, Bernard. *L'entretien au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Leçon inaugurale*. Montréal: les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1971.
- , "Loisir, Retraite, Solitude: de l'espace privé à la littérature." In *Le Loisir lettré à l'âge classique / Essais réunis par Marc Fumaroli, Philippe-Joseph Salazar et Emmanuel Bury*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1996, 173-195.
- Burke, Peter. The Fortunes of the "Courtier": The European Reception of Castiglione's "Cortegiano." Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.
- Buron, Emmanuel. "Lecture et récitation de la poésie dans la seconde moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle: le point de vue des poètes." *A Haute Voix: diction et prononciation aux XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles*. Olivia Rosenthal, ed. Paris: Klincksieck, 1998, 131-154.
- Bury, Emmanuel. *Littérature et politesse / L'invention de l'honnête homme 1580-1750*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996.

- , "Le Sourire de Socrate, ou peut-on être à la fois philosophe et honnête homme?" In *Le Loisir lettré à l'âge classique / Essais réunis par Marc Fumaroli, Philippe-Joseph Salazar et Emmanuel Bury*. Geneva: Libraire Droz, 1996, 197-212.
- Carlin, Claire. "Préciosité et théologie: l'amour conjugal chez Madeleine de Scudéry et dans quelques traités catholiques sur le mariage." In *Madeleine de Scudéry: une femme de lettres au XVIIe siècle / Actes du Colloque international de Paris (2001)*. Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2002, 141-153.
- Caswell, Austin B. "Remarques curieuses sur l'art de bien chanter" *Journal of the American Musicological Society* (1967), 20 (1), 116-120.
- Chantalat, Claude. "L'Esthétique de la grâce." In *A la recherche du goût classique*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1992, 141-162.
- Chaouche, Sabine. "A propos de l'Actio 'naturelle' prônée par Molière." *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* (Nov.-Dec. 1999), 99 (6), 1169-1190.
- , *L'art du comédien : déclamation et jeu scénique en France à l'âge classique, 1629-1680*. Paris: H. Champion, 2001.
- , *La philosophie de l'acteur : la dialectique de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur dans les écrits sur l'art théâtral français, 1738-1801*. Paris: H. Champion, 2007.
- Cohen, Albert. "L'Art de bien chanter (1666) of Jean Millet." *Musical Quarterly* (April 1969), 55 (2), 170-179.
- Collinet, Jean-Pierre. "L'Art de dire La Fontaine: naissance et développement d'une tradition." In *Correspondances / Mélanges offerts à Roger Duchêne*. Wolfgang Leiner, Pierre Ronzeaud, eds. Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1992, 82-91.
- Courtine, Jean-Jacques, and Claudine Haroche. *Histoire du visage / Exprimer et taire ses émotions / XVI<sup>e</sup> - début XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Paris: Rivages, 1998.
- Cowart, Georgia. *The Triumph of Pleasure: Louis XIV & the Politics of Spectacle*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Curtin, Michael. "A Question of Manners: Status and Gender in Etiquette and Courtesy." *The Journal of Modern History* (Sept. 1985), 57 (3), 395-423.
- Craveri, Benedetta. *La civiltà della conversazione*. Milan: Adelphi Edizioni, 2001.
- Dandrey, Patrick. *Molière ou L'esthétique du ridicule*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1992.
- , "Préface. La sagesse de l'élégance." In *Chevalier de Méré, Œuvres complètes*. Charles-H. Boudhors, ed. Paris: Klincksieck, 2008.
- Defaux, Gérard. *Molière ou Les métamorphoses du comique: de la comédie morale au triomphe de la folie*. Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1980.

- DeJean, Joan. *Tender Geographies / Women and the Origins of the Novel in France*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- Denis, Delphine. *La muse galante / Poétique de la conversation dans l'œuvre de Madeleine de Scudéry*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997.
- , "Charles Sorel et le Parnasse galant." In *Charles Sorel polygraphe*. É. Bury et É. Van der Schueren, eds. Québec (Québec): Presses de l'Université de Laval, 2006, 421-437.
- Desjardins, Lucie. *Le corps parlant, savoirs et représentation des passions au XVIIe siècle*. Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2001.
- Desroches, Vincent, "Représentation et métatexte dans l'*Impromptu de Versailles* et la Querelle de l'*École des femmes*." *Romance Notes* (Spring 1998), 38 (3), 321-331.
- Dewald, Jonathan. "Friendship, Love, and Civility." In *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture / France, 1570-1715*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- The Dialogue in Early Modern France, 1547-1630: Art and Argument*. Colette H. Winn, ed. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993.
- Dictionnaire analytique des œuvres théâtrales françaises du XVIIe siècle*. Marc Vuillermoz, ed. Paris: H. Champion, 1998.
- Donawerth, Jane. "'As Becomes a Rational Woman to Speak' / Madeleine de Scudéry's Rhetoric of Conversation." In *Listening to Their Voices / The Rhetorical Activities of Historical Women*. Molly Wertheimer, ed. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1997, 306-319.
- Duchêne, Roger. "De la chambre au Salon: réalités & représentations." *Vie des salons et activités littéraires: de Marguerite de Valois à Mme de Staël: actes du colloque de Nancy, 6-8 octobre 1999*. Roger Marchal, ed. Nancy: Presses universitaires de Nancy, 2001, 21-28.
- Dumonceaux, Pierre. "La Lecture à haute voix des œuvres littéraires au XVIIème siècle: Modalités et valeurs." *Textes et Langages* (1980), 4, 77-86.
- Durosoir, Georgie. "Timbre et geste créateur: compatibilités et antimonies." In *Timbre und Vaudeville: zur Geschichte und Problematik einer populären Gattung im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*. Herbert Schneider, ed. Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1999, 24-41.
- Elias, Norbert. *The Civilizing Process. Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. vol. 1. Edmund Jephcott, trans. Eric Dunning, Johan Goudsblom, Stephen Mennell, eds. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2000.
- , *The Court Society*. Edmund Jephcott, trans. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983.

- Fader, Don. "The *Honnête homme* as Music Critic: Taste, Rhetoric, and Politesse in the Seventeenth-Century French Reception of Italian Music." *Journal of Musicology* (Winter 2003), 20 (1), 3-44.
- Favier, Thierry. "Bénigne de Bacilly et ses airs spirituels: pédagogue aigri ou précurseur inspiré?" *Revue de Musicologie* (1997) 83 (1), 93-103.
- , "Plaisir musical et parodies spirituelles: les visages multiples de la réminiscence." In *Le Plaisir musical en France au XVIIe siècle*. Thierry Favier, Manuel Couvreur, eds. Sprimont: Mardaga, 2006, 115-127.
- Force, Pierre. *Molière ou Le prix des choses: morale, économie et comédie*. Paris: Nathan, 1994.
- Forestier, Georges. "Lire Racine." In *Racine / Œuvres complètes*. Georges Forestier, ed. Paris: Gallimard, 1999.
- Fumaroli, Marc. *L'Âge de l'Éloquence*. Geneva: Droz, 2002.
- , "La conversation." In *Trois institutions littéraires*. Paris: Gallimard, 1994.
- , "Otium, Convivium, Sermo: La conversation comme 'lieu commun' des lettrés." In *Le loisir lettré à l'âge classique*. Geneva: Droz, 1996.
- Gallotti, Cecilia. "Le voile d'honnêteté et la contagion des passions. La querelle sur la moralité du théâtre au XVIIe siècle." *Terrain* (1994), 22, 51-68.
- Garavini, Fausta. "*La Maison des Jeux*": science du roman & roman de la science au XVIIe siècle. Arlette Estève, trans. Paris: H. Champion, 1998.
- Génetiot, Alain. "Otium Literatum et poésie mondaine en France de 1625 à 1655." In *Le Loisir lettré à l'âge classique*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1996, 213-231.
- , *Poétique du loisir mondain, de Voiture à La Fontaine*. Paris: H. Champion, 1997.
- Gerbino, Giuseppe. *Music and the Myth of Arcadia in Renaissance Italy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Gibson, Jonathan. "'A Kind of Eloquence Even in Music: Embracing Different Rhetorics in Late Seventeenth-Century France." *Journal of Musicology* (Fall 2008), 25 (4), 394-433.
- Gilman, Donald. "Theories of Dialogue." In *The Dialogue in Early Modern France, 1547-1630 / Art and Argument*. Colette H. Win, ed. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1993.
- Girard, Françoise. "Le système éducatif à Saint-Cyr." In *Les Demoiselles de Saint-Cyr / Maison Royale d'Education (1686-1793)*. Paris: Somogy - Éditions d'art, 1999, 148-167.

- Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959.
- Goldsmith, Bobra Ballin. "Molière's 'Défense et Illustration': *La Critique de l'École des femmes*." *The French Review* (Apr. 1977), 50 (5), 688-697.
- Goldsmith, Elizabeth C. "'L' Art de détourner les choses': Sociability as Euphoria in Madeleine de Scudéry's *Conversations*." *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature* (1986), 13 (24), 17-27.
- , "Excess and Euphoria in Madeleine de Scudéry's *Conversations*." In *"Exclusive Conversations" / The Art of Interaction in Seventeenth-Century France*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988, 41-75.
- Goodman, Deana. "Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime." *History and Theory* (Feb. 1992), 31, 1-20.
- Gordon, Bonnie. "The Courtesan's Singing Body as Cultural Capital in Seventeenth-Century Italy." In *The Courtesan's Arts / Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. Martha Feldman, Bonnie Gordon, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 182-198.
- Gordon-Seifert, Catherine E. "Strong Men – Weak Women: Gender Representation and the Influence of Lully's 'Operatic Style' on French *Airs Sérieux* (1650-1700)." In *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women. Many-Headed Melodies*. Thomasin LaMay, ed. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005.
- Goulet, Anne-Madeleine. "Les divertissements musicaux du Samedi." In *Madeleine de Scudéry: une femme de lettres au XVIIe siècle / Actes du Colloque international de Paris (2001)*. Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2002, 203-216.
- , *Poésie, musique et sociabilité au XVIIe siècle: les "Livres d'airs de différents auteurs" publiés chez Ballard de 1658 à 1694*. Paris: H. Champion, 2004.
- Green, Eugène. "Le 'lieu' de la déclamation en France au XVIIe siècle." *Littératures classiques: La Voix au XVIIe siècle* (Jan.1990), 12, 274-291.
- , *La parole baroque: essai*. 1 book, 1 CD. Paris: Desclée de Brower, 2001.
- Hanning, Barbara R. "Conversation and Musical Style in the Late Eighteenth-Century Parisian Salon." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (Summer 1989), 22 (4), 512-528.
- Hansson, Stina. "Rhetoric for Seventeenth-Century Salons: Beata Rosenhane's Exercise Books and Classical Rhetoric." *Rhetorica* (Winter 1994), 12 (1), 43-65.
- Hénaff, Marcel. *Le prix de la vérité / le don, l'argent, la philosophie*. Paris: Seuil, 2002.
- Herlin, Denis. "Fossard et la musique italienne en France au XVIIe siècle." In *L'art vocal en France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*. Paris: Picard, 1998, 27-52.

- Herzel, Roger W. "The Decor of Molière Stage: The Testimony of Brissart and Chauveau." *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* (Oct. 1978), 93 (5), 925-954.
- Hoffmann, Kathryn. *Society of Pleasures: Interdisciplinary Readings in Pleasure and Power During the Reign of Louis XIV*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.
- Jacquemin, Hélène. *Livres et jeunes filles nobles à Saint-Cyr (1686-1793)*. Angers: Presses de l'Université d'Angers, 2007.
- Jaouën, Françoise. "Civility and the Novel: De Pure's *La précieuse ou le mystère des ruelles*." *Yale French Studies* (1997), 92, 105-125.
- Jones, Matthew. *The Good Life in the Scientific Revolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Jouhaud, Christian. "Sur le statut d'homme de lettres au XVIIe siècle / La correspondance de Jean Chapelain (1595-1674)." *Annales / Histoire, Sciences Sociales* (Mar.-Apr. 1994), 49 (2), 311-347.
- Kerbrat-Orecchioni, Catherine. *Les interactions verbales*. 2 vols. Paris: A. Colin, 1990, 1992.
- Kroll, Renate. "La chanson des femmes poètes au XVIIe siècle: Mme de la Suze et Mme Deshoulières – une contribution féminine à la poésie chantée." In *La chanson française et son histoire*. Dietmar Rieger, ed. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1988, 27-45.
- , "Poésie précieuse/poésie des précieuses: questions de genre et de gender." In *Madeleine de Scudéry: une femme de lettres au XVIIe siècle / Actes du Colloque international de Paris (2001)*. Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2002, 165-177.
- Lachèvre, Frédéric. *Bibliographie des Recueils collectifs de poésies publiés de 1597 à 1700*. Paris: Libraire Henri Leclerc, 1901.
- Landy-Houillon, Isabelle. "Mme de Sévigné: 'Dire en chantant'." In *Correspondances / Mélanges offerts à Roger Duchêne*. Wolfgang Leiner, Pierre Ronzeaud, eds. Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1992, 405-415.
- Leconte, Thomas. "La Comédie de chansons et son répertoire d'airs." In *Poésie, musique et société: l'air de cour en France au XVIIe siècle*. Georgie Durosoir, ed. Liège: Mardaga, 2006, 291-316.
- Lougee, Carolyn C. "Noblesse, Domesticity, and Social Reform: The Education of Girls by Fénelon and Saint-Cyr." In *History of Education Quarterly* (Spring 1974), 14 (1), 87-113.
- Lilti, Antoine. *Le Monde des salons / Sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Fayard, 2005.

- Magendie, Maurice. *La politesse mondaine et les théories de l'honnêteté, en France au XVIIe siècle, de 1600 à 1660* (1925). Geneva: Slatkine reprints, 1993.
- Magne, Émile. *Voiture et les origines de l'Hôtel de Rambouillet, 1597-1635*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1911.
- Maître, Myriam. *Les précieuses / Naissance des femmes de lettres en France au XVIIe siècle*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999.
- Massip, Catherine. *L'art de bien chanter: Michel Lambert, 1610-1696*. Paris: Société française de musicologie, 1999.
- , "Le Mécénat musical de Mademoiselle." *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature* (1995), 22 (42), 79-90.
- , *Les personnages musiciens dans les gravures de mode parisiennes de la fin du XVIIe siècle: intérêt et limites d'un genre iconographique*. [S.l.]: Imago musicae, 1987.
- , *La Vie des musiciens de Paris au temps de Mazarin: 1643-1661: essai d'étude sociale*. Paris: A. et J. Picard, 1976.
- McClary, Susan. "Temporality and Ideology: Qualities of Motion in Seventeenth-Century French Music." *ECHO* (Fall 2000), 2(2).
- , "Unruly Passions and Courtly Dances / Technologies of the Body in Baroque Music." In *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France*. Sara E. Melzer, Kathryn Norberg, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Menant, Sylvain. "Poésies fugitives." In *La Chute d'Icare / La Crise de la Poésie française 1700-1750*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1981, 217-272.
- Mendoza, Bernadette B. "L'art de vivre de l'honnête homme: éthique ou esthétique." *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature*. (1973), 1, 17-26.
- , "Un 'paradoxe sur le comédien' au XVIIe siècle." *Revue des Sciences humaines* (1973), 38 (152), 541-42.
- Mesnard, Jean. "Le Misanthrope: Mise en question de l'art de plaire." *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* (Sept.-Dec. 1972), 72 (5), 863-889.
- Norman, Larry F. "Entendre les vers comiques: l'intervention du poème écrit dans *Mélite*, *Les Visionnaires* et *La Comédie des Académistes*." *A Haute Voix: diction et prononciation aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles*. Olivia Rosenthal, ed. Paris: Klincksieck, 1998, 177-189.
- , *The Public Mirror / Molière and the Social Commerce of Depiction*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.

- Pensom, Roger. "Molière et le théâtre dans le théâtre." *Poétique* (Sept. 1996), 107, 321-332.
- Piéjus, Anne. *Le théâtre des demoiselles / Tragédie et musique à Saint-Cyr à la fin du Grand Siècle*. Paris: Société française de Musicologie, 2000.
- Pierson, Nathalie. "Du romanesque au spectaculaire: Mlle de Scudéry et Quinault." In *Madeleine de Scudéry: une femme de lettres au XVIIe siècle / Actes du Colloque international de Paris (2001)*. Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2002, 255-268.
- Plantié, Jacqueline. *La Mode du portrait littéraire en France: 1641-1681*. Paris: Champion, 1994.
- Prévot, Jacques. *La première institutrice de France: Madame de Maintenon*. Belin Bibliothèque, 1981.
- Priego-Valverde, Béatrice. *L'Humour dans la conversation familière: description et analyse linguistique*. Paris: l'Harmattan, 2003.
- Revel, Jacques. "Les Usages de la civilité." In *Histoire de la vie privée*. vol. 3. Philippe Ariès, Georges Duby, eds. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1986.
- Rojek, Chris. "Problems of Involvement and Detachment in the Writings of Norbert Elias." *The British Journal of Sociology* (Dec. 1986), 37 (4), 584-596.
- van Roosbroeck, Gustave L. "A Commonplace in Corneille's 'Mélite': The Madness of Eraste." *Modern Philology* (Jul. 1919), 17 (3), 141-149.
- Rosand, Ellen. "Barbara Strozzi, 'virtuosissima cantatrice': The Composer's Voice." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* (Summer 1978), 31 (2), 241-281.
- Rozik, Eli. "Hedges and Boundaries." In *The Roots of Theatre / Rethinking Ritual and Other Theories of Origin*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002.
- Schiffrin, Deborah. *Approaches to Discourse*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994.
- Sheldon, David A. "The concept *galant* in the 18<sup>th</sup> century." *Journal of Musicological Research* (Oct. 1989), 9 (2, 3), 89-108.
- Siouffi, Gilles. 2007. "Le mouvement 'anti-prescriptif' dans la culture mondaine à la fin du XVIIe siècle." Paper presented in the seminar *Aux frontières du licite. Règles, interdits et transgressions au XVIIe siècle* directed by Patrick Dandrey and Delphine Denis at the Université de Paris IV, October 30, Paris.
- Smith, Dennis. *Norbert Elias and Modern Social Theory*. London: SAGE Publications, 2001.
- Spitzer, John. "Grammar of Improvised Ornamentation: Jean Rousseau's Viol Treatise of 1687." *Journal of Music Theory* (Fall 1989), 33 (2), 299-332.



- Starobinski, Jean. "On Flattery." In *Blessings in Disguise; or, The Morality of Evil*, Arthur Goldhammer, trans. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993, 36-59.
- Strosetzki, Christoph. *Rhétorique de la conversation / Sa dimension littéraire et linguistique dans la société française du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Sabine Seubert, trans. Paris: Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature, 1984.
- Sweetser, Marie-Odile. "De l'idéal galant à l'héroïsme amoureux." In *Madeleine de Scudéry: une femme de lettres au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle / Actes du Colloque international de Paris (2001)*. Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2002, 133-140.
- Taphanel, Achille. *Le Théâtre de Saint-Cyr (1689-1792) d'après des documents inédits*. Versailles: Cerf et fils, 1876.
- Trilling, Lionel. "Sincerity: Its Origins and Rise." In *Sincerity and Authenticity*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972, 3-25.
- Tunley, David. "Grimarest's 'Traite du Recitatif': Glimpses of Performance Practice in Lully's Operas." *Early Music* (Aug. 1987), 15 (3), 361-364.
- Verschaeve, Michel. *Le Traité de chant et mise en scène baroques*. Paris: Zurfluh, 1997.
- Viala, Alain. "Le naturel." In *Nature et Culture à l'âge classique (XVI<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1997, 61-76.
- Wehowsky, Andreas, and Carol Poore. "Making Ourselves More Flexible than We Are: Reflections on Norbert Elias." *New German Critique* (Autumn 1978), 15, 65-80.
- Westney, William. *The Perfect Wrong Note / Learning to Trust Your Musical Self*. Cambridge: Amadeus Press, 2003.
- Zecher, Carla. "The Gendering of the Lute in Sixteenth-Century French Love Poetry." *Renaissance Quarterly* (Autumn 2000), 53 (3), 769-791.
- Zoberman, Pierre. "Entendre raillerie." In *Thèmes et genres littéraires aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*. Paris: PUF, 1992, 179-184.